Cholesterol: The Good, the Bad and the Tasty

By: Paula Peck, RD Clinical Nutrition Manager, Eisenhower Medical Center

Strawberry Wake-Up Breakfast Parfait

We have all heard of cholesterol and its negative effects on one's well being, but do we really know how it affects us, both positively and negatively?

Cholesterol is an essential substance that helps in the formation of the body's cells and hormones. It is produced in the liver and works with lowdensity lipoproteins or LDL.Then, the highdensity lipoproteins, or HDL, carry the cholesterol back to the liver to be cleaned and eliminated from the body. HDL helps remove cholesterol from the body, and therefore is considered, "good."

Cholesterol becomes problematic when there is a buildup of excessive amounts of LDL cholesterol in the body. Foods are not the only source of cholesterol. The body manufactures approximately 1,000 mgs (milligrams) of cholesterol daily. A small amount of LDL is required to produce vitamins, bile and cell membranes. The unused LDL may be deposited along the arterial walls. This "buildup" of unused LDL (also known as "bad" cholesterol) may ultimately block the smooth flow of blood and oxygen to vital organs.This condition is known as atherosclerosis.

A simple blood test given by your physician can routinely monitor the levels of LDL and HDL cholesterol in your body. An LDL level of 100 mgs or less is ideal, while a level of 190 mgs or greater increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

An HDL ("good" cholesterol") level of 60 mg or higher means your body is doing a very good job of getting rid of excess cholesterol; a reading of 40 mg or lower poses a potential risk.

How can you balance these numbers? A good diet low in saturated fats (fruits, vegetables, whole grain cereals), regular exercise and a healthy lifestyle, are key to maintaining healthy levels. Research has shown that heredity also plays a key role in the existence of high cholesterol levels, and so monitoring cholesterol levels is especially important if you have a family history of high cholesterol.

Making smart food choices can be easier than you think. Many people operate under the misconception that foods lacking a lot of fat and cholesterol, also lack taste. This is not the case. Here's an easy and convenient recipe that's both tasty…and good for you.

Strawberry Wake-Up Breakfast Parfait 2 ounces Low-fat granola 4 ounces Vanilla yogurt 4 ounces Fresh strawberries, with strawberry glaze 2 ounces Fat-free, whipped topping Layer ingredients: 2 ounces Strawberries 2 ounces Yogurt 2 ounces Strawberries 2 ounces Yogurt 2 ounces Granola 2 ounces Whipped Topping

Healthy Living is a publication of Eisenhower Medical Center · © Copyright 2015 All Rights Reserved · www.emc.org