

High Blood Cholesterol

Cholesterol, a yellowish fatty substance, is one of the essential ingredients of the body. Although it is essential to life, it has a bad reputation, being a major villain in heart disease. Every person with high blood cholesterol is regarded as a potential candidate for heart attack, a stroke or high blood pressure.

Causes

Hypercholesterolaemia or increase in cholesterol is mainly a digestive problem caused by rich foods such as fried foods, excessive consumption of milk and its products like ghee, butter and cream, white flour, sugar, cakes, pastries, biscuits, cheese, ice cream as well as non-vegetarian foods like meat, fish and eggs. Other causes of increase in cholesterol are irregularity in habits, smoking and drinking alcohol.

Stress has been found to be a major cause of increased level of cholesterol. Adrenaline and cortisone are both released in the body under stress. This, in turn, produces a fat metabolizing reaction. Adrenal glands of executive type aggressive persons produce more adrenaline than the easy going men. Consequently they suffer six to eight times more heart attacks than the relaxed men.

Treatment

To reduce the risk of heart disease, it is essential to lower the level of LDL and increase the level of HDL. This can be achieved by improving the diet and changing the life style. Diet is the most important factor. As a first step, foods rich in cholesterol and saturated fats, which lead to increase in LDL level, should be reduced to the minimum. Cholesterol -rich foods are eggs, organ meats and most cheese, butter, bacon, beef, whole milk, virtually all foods of animal origin as well as two vegetable oils, namely coconut and palm, are high in saturated fats and these should be replaced by polyunsaturated fats such as corn, safflower, sobayean and sesame oils which tend to lower the level of LDL. There are monosaturated fats such as olive and peanut oils which have more or less neutral effect on the LDL level.

The American Heart Association recommends that men should restrict themselves to 300 mg. of cholesterol a day and women to 275 mg. It also prescribes that fat should not make up more than 30 per cent of the diet and not more than one third of this should be saturated. The Association, however, urges a somewhat strict regimen for those who already have elevated levels of cholesterol.

The amount of fiber in the diet also influences the cholesterol levels and LDL cholesterol can be lowered by taking diets rich in fibres. The most significant sources of dietary fiber are unprocessed wheat bran, whole cereals such as wheat , rice, barley, rye; legumes such as potato, carrot, beet and turnips; fruits like mango and guava and green vegetables such as cabbage, lady's finger, lettuce and celery. Oat bran is especially beneficial in lowering LDL cholesterol.

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Lecithin, also a fatty food substance and the most abundant of the phospholipids, is highly beneficial in case of increase in cholesterol level. It has the ability to break up cholesterol into small particles which can be easily handled by the system. With sufficient intake of lecithin, cholesterol cannot build up against the walls of the arteries and veins. It also increases the production of bile acids made from cholesterol, thereby reducing its amount in the blood. Egg yolk, vegetable oils, whole grain cereals, soybeans and unpasteurised milk are rich sources of lecithin. The cells of the body are also capable of synthesizing it as needed, if several of the B vitamins are present.

Diets high in vitamin B6, cholin and inositol supplied by wheat germ, yeast, or B vitamins extracted from bran have been particularly effective in reducing blood cholesterol. Sometimes vitamin E elevates blood lecithin and reduces cholesterol presumably by preventing the essential fatty acids from being destroyed by oxygen.

Persons with high blood cholesterol level should drink at least eight to 10 glasses of water every day as regular drinking of water stimulates the excretory activity of the skin and kidneys. This in turn facilitates elimination of excessive cholesterol from the system. Regularly drinking of coriander (dhania) water also helps lower blood cholesterol as it is a good diuretic and stimulates the kidneys. It is prepared by boiling dry seeds of coriander and straining the decoction after cooling.

Regular exercise also plays an important role in lowering LDL cholesterol and in raising the level of protective HDL. It also promotes circulation and helps maintain the blood flow to every part of the body. Jogging or brisk walking, swimming, bicycling and playing badminton are excellent forms of exercise.

Yogasanas are highly beneficial as they help increase perspiratory activity and stimulate sebaceous glands to effectively secrete accumulated or excess cholesterol from the muscular tissue. Asanas like ardhmatsyaendrasana, shalabhasana, padmasana and vajrasana are useful in lowering blood cholesterol by increasing systemic activity. Hydrotherapy can be successfully employed in reducing excess cholesterol. Cold hip baths for 10 minutes taken twice every day have proved beneficial. Steam baths are also helpful except in patients suffering from hypertension and other circulatory disorders. Mud packs, applied over the abdomen improve digestion and assimilation. They improve the functioning of the liver and other digestive organs and activate kidneys and the intestines to promote better excretion.

Reference

Shri H.K. Bakhru. (1999). Natures Cure.