



Catholic Healthcare West

Ask the Expert

Arizona Republic

Q: What does it mean if I have high LDL cholesterol and does this put me at risk for heart disease?

A: There are two different kinds of cholesterol – LDL, which is known as the “bad” cholesterol and HDL which is the “good” cholesterol. According to the American Heart Association, high levels of LDL cholesterol can build up on the inner walls of your arteries. If a clot forms and blocks a narrowed artery, a heart attack or stroke can occur.

Having high cholesterol is a risk factor that contributes to coronary heart disease, heart attack and stroke. The good news is there are ways to help manage your cholesterol levels, including lifestyle changes. Your diet, weight, physical activity and exposure to tobacco smoke all affect your cholesterol level. All of these factors may be controlled by:

- “ **Eating a heart healthy diet.** Be sure to incorporate fruits and vegetables, as well as whole grains and high-fiber foods, lean meats, poultry, and fish into your diet. It’s also important to read food labels. You want to look for foods that are low in cholesterol and saturated fat. Be sure to avoid foods that have *trans* fats.
- “ **Get active.** The American Heart Association recommends that people get at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. By eating healthy and staying active, you will be able to maintain a healthy weight, which is also important when managing your cholesterol.
- “ **Avoid tobacco products.** Tobacco smoke is one of the six major controllable risk factors for heart disease, as is managing high cholesterol. If you smoke **and** have high cholesterol, you have two major controllable risk factors you need to work on. Exposure to other people's smoke increases the risk of heart disease even for nonsmokers.

It’s important to educate yourself on cholesterol and how it can affect your body. Be sure to maintain a relationship with your health care provider and follow any medication therapies that are recommended. You may also take an easy, online evaluation to determine if you are at risk for cardiovascular disease. Simply log on to www.chwhealthspan.org/heartaware to take Catholic Healthcare West’s free evaluation. The test takes less than seven minutes to complete and may just save his life.



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Darcel Taylor, R.N., is the cardiac clinician for CHW's HeartAware™ program. To learn more about HeartAware™, or to arrange for a free, in-person consultation, please visit www.chwhealthspan.org/heartaware or call 480.728.3639.