



# Cholesterol Management Program Information Sheet

## 1. What does cholesterol have to do with heart disease?

### What are other risks?

If you have high cholesterol, the chance you might have a heart attack goes up. Your chance of having a heart attack is even greater if you have a high cholesterol level **and** you have other heart attack risks: high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking or lack of physical activity. Women have a lower risk than men before menopause, but after menopause women's risk goes up. Doing what you can to lower your personal risks lowers the chance you will have a heart attack.

## 2. Should I consider taking medicine to lower my cholesterol?

If you already have heart disease, high blood pressure or a family history of heart disease, you should consider taking medicine for your high cholesterol because these risks greatly increase your chance of heart disease.

## 3. Will cholesterol lowering medicine help me?

Looking at your personal risks for heart disease helps you and your health care provider decide whether medicine might help you. Your chance of having a heart attack comes from your personal risks, including cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking and your family's history of early heart disease (heart attack before age 55 in men or age 65 in women). It is also important to look at the amount you have of two different kinds of cholesterol: LDL (called "bad" cholesterol) and HDL (called "good cholesterol"). If your LDL cholesterol is high and your HDL cholesterol is low, medicine may help.

## 4. How does changing what I eat and making lifestyle changes help lower my cholesterol?

- a. There is no risk to lowering your cholesterol by eating healthfully. Even if you go on medication, a low fat diet helps the medication work. It may lower the amount of medication you need.
- b. Your body turns the fat you eat into cholesterol which blocks your arteries, so a low fat diet is important whether or not you need medicine.
- c. Fruits, vegetables and foods with fiber, like beans and bran, help keep cholesterol from blocking your arteries.
- d. Being physically active (walking, running or biking) for at least 30 minutes on most days can help you manage high blood pressure and diabetes, increase your HDL (good) cholesterol and help you keep a stable weight.

**5. What if I've already had a heart attack? Will lowering my cholesterol still help?**

Lowering your cholesterol by changing what you eat and taking medicine (for some people) will help prevent future heart attacks. Lowering your cholesterol can help the blockages in your arteries get smaller or even go away.

**6. How long does it take for the medicine to work?  
Will I need the medicine forever?**

It can take years to work. Most people who take medication to lower cholesterol take it for the rest of their lives.

**7. What else can I do to lower my risk of heart disease?**

- a. If you smoke, quit smoking. It is the most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease.
- b. If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, work with your health care providers to keep these conditions well controlled.
- c. If you are overweight, consider losing even 5-10 pounds (by changing the way you eat and getting more physical activity). Even a small weight loss can lower your risk of heart disease.
- d. If you are a woman who has gone through menopause, discuss the pros and cons of taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) with your health care provider.
- e. Talk to your health care providers about the risks and benefits of taking other medications like aspirin and Vitamin E or other supplements.