

CHOLESTEROL SCREENING

Heart Disease is a major health problem in America. Each year, more than 6 million men and women have symptoms of heart disease. More than 1 million Americans suffer a heart attack and over 500,000 die of coronary heart disease.

High blood cholesterol increases the chance that a person will develop coronary heart disease. In general, a child who has high blood cholesterol will tend to have high blood cholesterol as an adult. Other risk factors for heart disease include obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, tobacco use, and family history.

Most heart disease is due to “atherosclerosis,” a process involving the buildup of cholesterol and fat in the walls of arteries. This buildup narrows the arteries, slowing and eventually blocking the flow of blood. “Heart attacks” occur when oxygen-rich blood can no longer reach the heart muscle because of a blocked artery. Lowering blood cholesterol slows the fatty buildup and reduces the risk of heart disease. Blocked blood vessels can also cause strokes and other diseases of the arteries.

Cholesterol screening in childhood is recommended to identify elevated cholesterol levels, thus enabling families to develop heart-healthy habits that lower the risk of heart disease later in life. All children are tested at age 9-11 and again at age 17-21. There are many factors that affect the blood cholesterol level. These include genetics (family history), diet, and exercise.

Routine screening (for children without risk factors) measures total cholesterol and HDL cholesterol. Fasting before this test is not necessary. If your child has risk factors for heart disease, s/he will be tested at a younger age with a “fasting lipid profile”; this test requires an overnight fast and gives more detailed information about how cholesterol is carried in your child’s blood.

We will help you to understand the results of your child’s cholesterol test and advise you about when to repeat it. Treating elevated cholesterol involves changes to the diet as well as regular exercise. For overweight or obese children, weight loss is important. Medication is available for children whose cholesterol levels are too high even with diet and exercise.

For more information, see our handouts:

CHILD Diet for cholesterol and obesity

Positive Eating Habits

Promoting Physical Activity

Weight Management for Children

Vegetables - My Kid Won't Eat

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