Tips to lower your cholesterol

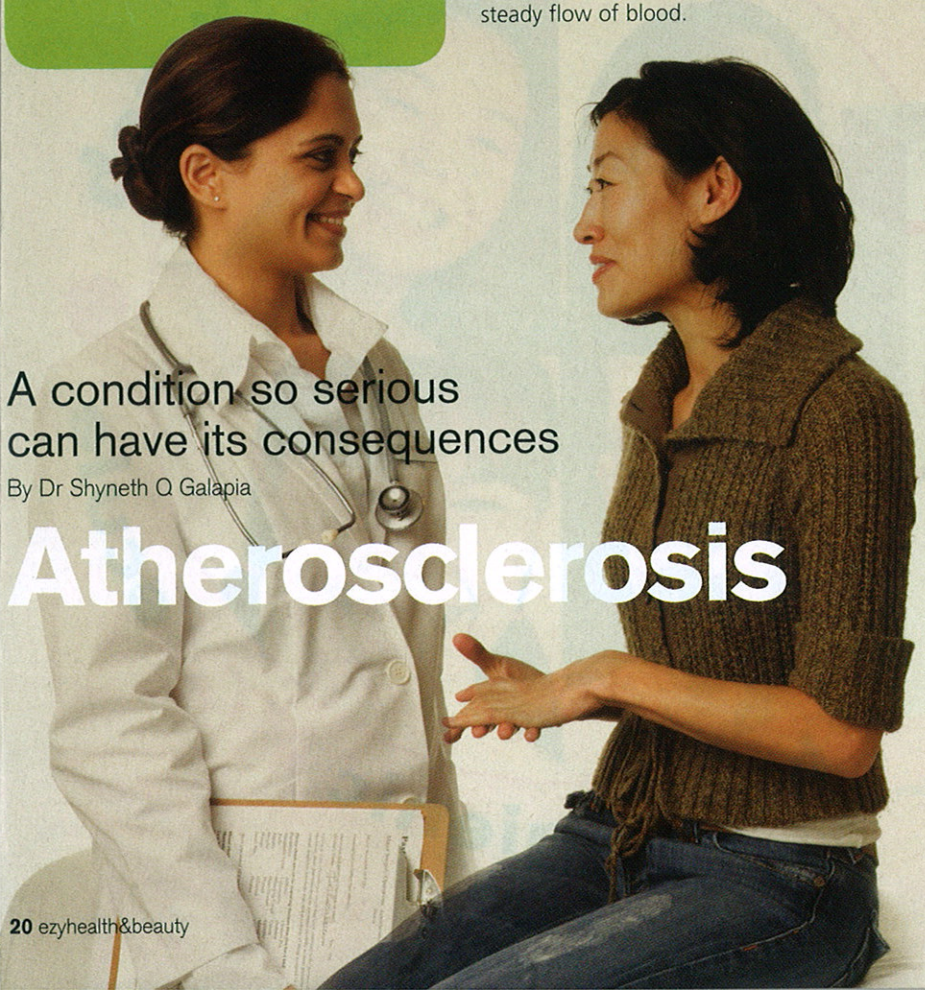
- **KNOW YOUR NUMBERS**
Talk to your doctor and have your lipid profile checked. Discuss with the doctor what the numbers mean, to successfully lower them.

- **EVALUATE AND MODIFY YOUR LIFESTYLE**
Control the factors that increase your risk for developing atherosclerosis such as high blood cholesterol level, smoking, obesity, hypertension and high blood sugar.

- **BE MINDFUL OF FATS**
Replace saturated fats (palm oil, palm kernel oil, coconut oil) in your diet with healthy unsaturated fats (olive oil, fish oil, canola oil). Limit trans fat in your diet.

- **GET MOVING**
Exercise lowers cholesterol by increasing levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) in the blood, while reducing low-density lipoproteins (LDL).

- **INCREASE DIETARY FIBRE**
A high fibre diet decreases LDL by reducing the absorption of cholesterol in the intestines.



A condition so serious can have its consequences

By Dr Shyneth Q Galapia

Atherosclerosis

A lot has been said and written about cholesterol in the past, hoping to increase public awareness of the implications of unhealthy blood cholesterol levels. A survey conducted by The Research Partnership, together with Singapore Heart Foundation (SHF) and AstraZeneca Asia Pacific revealed, however, that Singaporeans take cholesterol and atherosclerosis too lightly. It showed that few people are aware that cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in women in Singapore.

Mr Mark Yates, Managing Director of The Research Partnership says, "Singaporeans underestimate the danger of heart disease, especially in women, wrongly perceiving breast cancer to be the leading cause of death."

What is atherosclerosis?

Atherosclerosis is a disease of the arteries, the blood vessels that carry oxygen-laden blood into the heart and other parts of the body. The innermost layer of an artery, called tunica intima (made of endothelial cells), is normally smooth to allow the steady flow of blood.

When the endothelial cells are damaged by smoking, high amounts of cholesterol in the blood, hypertension and diabetes, the tunica intima lining becomes uneven. A cascade of events follows an endothelial injury – over time, cholesterol, calcium and other substances in the blood build up inside the arteries, resulting in the formation of a plaque.

A plaque causes narrowing of an artery. It may also rupture, leading to blockage of an artery. Both conditions reduce the blood flow to vital organs in the body, which may result in stroke, heart attack and renal failure. Plaque formation may also weaken the arterial walls, increasing the likelihood of the artery to rupture (e.g. aortic aneurysm). All of these conditions can be fatal.

Major risk factors

While some factors like increasing age, male gender, family history of heart disease at an early age, and genetic abnormalities predispose a person to develop atherosclerosis, other factors can still be controlled. These include high blood cholesterol level, smoking, obesity, hypertension and diabetes. Early detection and health education are very important to interrupt the progression of the cardiovascular disease.

Cholesterol is naturally produced by the liver or obtained from the diet and is essential in the formation of steroids and bile salts. It occurs in three forms: low density lipoprotein (LDL or bad cholesterol), high density lipoprotein (HDL or good cholesterol) and triglyceride. Excessive cholesterol (particularly LDL) does more harm than good – sticking to the walls of damaged arteries and becoming a plaque.

Atherosclerosis can begin in childhood, slowly progressing over time. Typically, a person is unaware of this, until life-threatening consequences of the disease are evident. Atherosclerosis is a disease with grave consequences, but if caught early, can be successfully treated. ♥

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