



Insurance Agency

September 2015

Completely Well

Preventive

National Cholesterol Education Awareness Month

September is National Cholesterol Education Awareness Month. It's important to understand what cholesterol is and why you should know your numbers.

What is cholesterol? It is a waxy, fat-like substance in the walls of our cells in all parts of our body. Cholesterol is used by our body to make vitamin D, hormones, bile salts, and cell membranes. Our body makes cholesterol in the liver and it is circulated in our bloodstream. Cholesterol is also found in many of the foods we eat, such as animal products (meat and whole dairy), eggs, and certain shellfish. Cholesterol travels through our bloodstream in lipoproteins, which have the fat inside and protein on the outside. There are two kinds of lipoproteins that carry cholesterol in the blood: Low Density Lipoproteins (LDL) and High Density Lipoprotein (HDL).

LDL is referred to as the "bad" cholesterol as it carries the cholesterol to tissues and the arteries.

The higher your LDL level is in the blood, the higher your risk of heart disease. HDL is considered the "good" cholesterol as it takes cholesterol away from the tissues to the liver where it is removed from the body. You want the HDL number to be high. Low level of HDL will increase your risk for heart disease.

Why is there a problem if the cholesterol is high? The excess cholesterol can be "trapped" in artery walls. It will build up and become plaque that will narrow blood vessels and harden the arteries (atherosclerosis). If the

Continued on the next page

In this Issue

- What is Fasting?
- Fall Back on Routines
- How learning impacts health
- Functional Fitness
- National Cholesterol Education Awareness Month

Cholesterol, continued....

coronary arteries (heart blood vessels) become partially blocked, the blood may not be able to bring the required amount of oxygen and nutrients to the heart muscle creating chest pain or angina. Some plaques may break off and can cause a blood clot to form, thereby blocking the flow through the artery and causing a heart attack.

If your cholesterol is high, there are ways to treat it. First, eat more fruits and vegetable and reduced processed foods. Reduce or eliminate your dietary cholesterol (beef, poultry, and seafood; dairy products that are not fat free; butter, coconut oil, and palm oil; fried foods; and processed foods that contain any of these ingredients or that contain trans fats). Next, increase your exercise to 150 minutes per week (with doctor's permission) as this will help increase the good cholesterol. Finally, maintain a healthy weight. Your doctor may prescribe cholesterol reducing drug known as a statin. Discuss the pros and cons with your doctor

Diet Tips to Lower Your Cholesterol

- **Olive Oil – monounsaturated fat can help reduce LDL cholesterol levels**
- **Green tea – can improve cholesterol and blood pressure**
- **Garlic – a great food for preventing blood clots and lowering cholesterol**
- **Nuts – especially walnuts**

and be sure to follow up have your cholesterol checked regularly.

Lifestyle

Health Benefits of Learning

We know that eating right and exercising is important for our health. But did you know that learning something new could be good for your health too? Learning something new challenges your brain and stimulates the connections between brain cells or even creates new connections. These connections help to keep your brain healthy, which has a positive impact on your overall health.

Learning something new can enhance self-esteem and confidence. There is also evidence that there is a link between adult learning and an increase in both social activities and community involvement, both important for emotional health (Field, *Social Capital and Lifelong Learning 2005*). Challenging yourself with something new can expand who you thought you were and what you could do, removing limitations you may have placed on yourself.

You don't have to throw yourself in to a semester class to reap the benefits. Volunteer at work to learn something new in your field. Use your down time to watch a Ted-Ed video or check out some of the many reputable sites, blogs, and "vlogs" (video blogs) such as Crash Course, GrammarGirl, How Stuff Works, Numberphile, or The Periodic Table of Videos, just to name a few. Take a class at your local park district or head to the library and check out something new!



The Importance of Routines

Each of us has routines that we are aware of and even routines that we are not aware of. Routines give us a sense of order, reduce anxiety and can help keep us motivated. The beginning of another school year is a good time for us to examine our routines and make any changes necessary to make our day a little easier.

Morning: Set a wake-up time that allows enough time to get ready before work and school without being rushed. Any sleep gained from sleeping a little later is negated by a hectic rush out the door. For families, encouraging kids to make their beds instills responsibility and a sense of pride in their rooms. Make sure everyone has a good breakfast! It doesn't have to be a big traditional breakfast but should include a protein, complex carbohydrate, a source of calcium and healthy fat. Some examples include a low-sugar, high fiber cereal with milk and sliced fruit; whole grain toast with peanut butter and a glass of almond milk; oatmeal and raisins; leftover vegetable pizza; handful of nuts and a banana; a yogurt and whole grain cracker; or a smoothie made with fruit and milk or yogurt.

Afternoon: A mid-afternoon snack is not only a needed "bridge" between lunch and dinner but also a good opportunity to get some of the vitamins and fiber needed in a daily diet. Some quiet time, even 5 minutes with the door closed at work, can help you recharge. Families with children should create a schedule that allows for some downtime as well as time to complete schoolwork.

Dinner: Despite our busy schedules, dinner should be a priority. Whenever possible, family members should sit down to dinner without the distraction of the television or radio. A variety of studies show that family meals are important for emotional and physical health. Families that sit down together for dinner eat more vegetables and fiber and less fatty foods. A Harvard study found that children who ate dinner with their families 5 or more days a week were less likely to be depressed or engage in risky behaviors. Family dinners are also associated with better academic performance, higher test scores and better language skills. For those without children or even empty nesters, making time for a home cooked dinner is still the healthy option. Avoid the drive through, and prepare dinner ingredients in advance to make cooking even easier.

Bedtime: Get ready for the next day by having everything organized and in a set place. Create a regular bedtime and stick to it as often as possible.

Establishing routines help to create a comfortable environment that is peaceful and orderly. With routines in place, you should be smoothly sailing into the school year.

Tips for a More Organized Day:

- **Open your mail everyday. Even better, open your mail next to a garbage/recycle can and shredder!**
- **Prepackage all non-perishable food items for lunches. This makes it easier to pack lunch quickly.**
- **On the day you do laundry, put your clothes away as outfits (e.g., shirt with pants). Getting dressed in the morning will be easier!**

Nutrition

Fasting

Fasting -reducing or abstaining from food or drink for a specific period of time.

While many of us may associate fasting with religious observances or as a necessary step for medical screenings or procedures, fasting has recently been promoted as beneficial for the immune system, blood pressure, cholesterol, and insulin sensitivity. Let's examine the different types, the benefits, and risks of fasting.

Unless fasting is necessary and has a specific number of hours or requirements to meet, it can be as simple as skipping a meal or reducing calories for a short period of time. Research into the benefits of fasting go back as far as the first half of the 20th century, where evidence seemed to point to an increased life span as a result of calorie restriction. Recent research has specifically connected periodic fasting with greater insulin sensitivity and possibly a lower risk of degenerative brain disease (Mattson, National Institute of Health). Studies have examined periodic fasting and its positive effect on the immune system and cholesterol levels. There is research that questions the benefits of fasting. Study results have included the development of heart problems and increased blood sugars. Additionally, not everyone is a candidate for fasting, depending on individual health and lifestyle.

The takeaway is that some sort of calorie restriction may be beneficial for the average adult. It's important to maximize the nutrition in your diet if you are going to take in fewer calories. Additionally, drinking plenty of water is important so as to not become dehydrated. If you are interested in periodic fasting or calorie restriction, discuss the benefits and risks for you with your doctor.



Produce of the Month: Pomegranate

You may have seen the name "pomegranate" on both mainstream juice and health food products lately. It certainly seems that pomegranates are seeing a rise in popularity, due much in part to their luscious flavor and health benefits. Pomegranates are about the size of a medium or large apple, and have a deep red-purple skin. The real beauty of the pomegranate comes when cut open, as the pomegranate has over hundreds of edible seeds that are encased in something like small juice sacs, sweet and tart and perfect for snacking and for including in many recipes. Pomegranates are high in vitamin C, low in calories and contain powerful antioxidants that are linked to a healthier heart and prevention of disease.

The Basics: Pomegranates are considered in season from September through December. Most of those bought in the United States are grown in California or Arizona. When buying a pomegranate, choose one that is heavy for its size and without obvious bruises. A whole pomegranate can be stored out of direct sunlight at room temperature for up to 3 days. You can store a whole pomegranate in the refrigerator in a plastic bag for up to 3 months. To prepare a pomegranate, cut off the crown and then cut the fruit into manageable sections. You can then place the sections in a bowl of cool water and remove the juice sacs (arils) gently with your fingers. (Warning: pomegranates stain clothing and fabric very easily.) Remove the membrane and drain the water. The arils can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days and can also be

Continued on next page....

Pomegranate, continued...

frozen for later use. Pomegranate arils can be eaten as is, and whether you eat the seed or spit it out is a personal preference. Pomegranate can be a sweet addition to salads, morning oatmeal, yogurt, and even as a topping for vanilla ice cream. If you prefer to try making pomegranate juice, strain the juice to remove any seeds or sediment that may have passed through the juicer.

Try This: Marinate chicken in pomegranate juice, olive oil, a little brown sugar, ginger and garlic. Or add some (without seeds) to your favorite brownie recipe for a delicious chocolate-pomegranate combo.

The Facts: A cup of pomegranate arils is 190 calories, has no fat and has 5 grams of fiber (if you eat the seeds). It is a good source of vitamin C, potassium and polyphenols, an antioxidant that is linked to cardiovascular health.

Functional Fitness

Fitness

The word “fitness” may make you think of a number of things, particularly physical strength and endurance. People head to the gym each day trying to improve their fitness by using weight machines and using the treadmill. But fitness means more than the ability to complete a set of leg extensions on the weight machine and do 30 minutes on the elliptical. Fitness is also about being able to complete your everyday activities with energy, ease and flexibility. This is what “functional fitness” is all about.

No matter what your normal day requires - lifting, bending, hurrying from place to place - being fit should help you complete your jobs easily. Being able to lift a heavy weight is great - but you should also be able to bend over without pulling your back muscles. Functional fitness also applies to activities you would like to do (e.g., ski, skate, bike, row, etc.). Looking at the ways you move and wish to move will help you understand the fitness demands you have for your body.

Most functional fitness exercises focus on stability, flexibility and body weight. Rather than a weight machine that targets a specific muscle group, functional fitness exercises will require you to control and balance your own body weight, often while lifting a free weight. Form is key to functional fitness. Weight machines help keep your body in alignment even when you are fatigued. Functional fitness exercises need you to concentrate on form at all times to reduce the risk of injury. You should stop an exercise when it is too difficult to maintain your form.

Including flexibility and balance exercises (as in yoga and Pilates) is also good for functional fitness. Stretching well and building the body’s core can help with flexibility and balance, which are essential for avoiding injury.

Building activities into your exercise program that mimic the types of movements you do on a daily basis can help your fitness level. Some common exercises for functional fitness include squats, bent-over row, yoga poses and using stability balls. If you work out at a gym, ask a trainer for ideas of how to include functional fitness exercises into your workout. Added to the more traditional strength training and aerobic workouts, functional fitness can complete an overall fitness program to help you at work and at play.

Ask the Trainer



Question: Can you recommend a few books on weight loss, nutrition, and/or exercise?

Answer: That is a great question I get asked regularly. One of my favorite books is Dr. Fuhrman's *Eat to Live*. This was an amazing book that really opened my eyes to what we put in our bodies. If you are unfamiliar with Dr. Fuhrman's work, you should know that he is a strict vegan. I am not a vegan, but this book definitely made me look carefully at animal products and how much I use them.

Another great book is *PUSH: 30 Days to Turbocharged Habits, a Bangin' Body, and the Life You Deserve* by Chalene Johnson. This book is an all around good read. It has a little bit of everything from fitness, nutrition and just an all around lifestyle change. Chalene is one of my fitness mentors. She has taught me a lot of wonderful things and this book solidified it all.

Another great book on nutrition and fitness is *Younger Next Year: Live Strong, Fit, and Sexy - Until You're 80 and Beyond* by Chris Crowley and Henry S. Lodge. This book was given to me by one of the participants in my weight loss program, and it was a great read. If you are a man or woman over the age of 40 years old looking to lose weight, this is a must READ!!! This book specifically talks about all the changes one has going on after the age of 40 and how to get fit and stay healthy for a lifetime.

Erin M. Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT

Want to know more?

Contact TCU Insurance for information on wellness programs. We can help you reduce healthcare costs and improve employee well being.



Insurance Agency