LDL Program: Cholesterol and LDL

What is *good* and *bad* cholesterol? The word cholesterol conjures up many different thoughts in people’s brains. Our body actually needs cholesterol and makes most of what we need on its own. What comes from our diet is also necessary - just not too much. Cholesterol is an important component of our cells to function and our brains during development as babies. The problem lies when certain types of cholesterol become overabundant in the bloodstream. LDL cholesterol is what is called the “bad” cholesterol. One third of all American adults have high LDL cholesterol and it can become high even as early as childhood. High LDL cholesterol causes plaques to build in your arteries. Plaques increase a person’s risk for heart attack, heart disease and stroke.

**Activity: Myth Bust Cholesterol**

Select true or false for each statement!

1. Cholesterol is always bad for you.
   - True
   - False

2. If you are thin, you don’t need to worry about your cholesterol levels and won’t have high cholesterol.
   - True
   - False

3. Cholesterol can only be lowered by taking medicine.
   - True
   - False

4. Cholesterol only comes from food.
   - True
   - False

5. High Cholesterol doesn’t affect kids.
   - True
   - False

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Answer key:

1)  **False:**  **Fact:**  There are two types of cholesterol. The first is high-density lipoprotein (HDL). This “good” cholesterol helps remove some of the “bad” cholesterol from your body. On results from a cholesterol test, a higher HDL is best. The second type of cholesterol is low-density lipoprotein (LDL). This “bad” cholesterol is caused by a buildup of plaque in your artery walls. Too much plaque can block your blood vessels, ultimately leading to heart attack or stroke. A high LDL is concerning, but don’t panic. A primary care physician or cardiologist can help reduce your levels.

2)  False:  While people who are overweight are more likely to have high cholesterol, it affects thin people, too. Everyone ages 20 and older should have their cholesterol levels checked every four to six years, according to the American Heart Association.

3)  **False:**  **Fact:**  A healthy lifestyle is key to maintaining healthy cholesterol levels. If you have or are at risk of developing high cholesterol, a healthy diet full of fresh fruit and vegetables, increased physical activity and quitting smoking can help lower your levels. However, there are some people whose high cholesterol will remain no matter what lifestyle changes they make. In these cases, a physician may prescribe cholesterol-lowering medications.

4)  **False:**  **Fact:**  While cholesterol can come from some of the animal products you eat, such as meat, fish, eggs and whole milk, your liver naturally produces cholesterol. For some people, their liver makes more cholesterol than is needed. In those cases, high cholesterol is possible, but a balanced diet coupled with careful management will help keep their levels in check.

5)  **False:**  **Fact:**  There’s an inherited form of high cholesterol, called familial hypercholesterolemia, that puts kids at high risk of heart disease. Talk to your pediatrician to see if you should test your child’s cholesterol. Plus, all kids can benefit from an early start on a healthy diet and lifestyle that can reduce the risk of future heart problems.