Understanding your Cholesterol and Triglycerides

Getting down to the basics. Lipids refer to “fats” normally found in your blood. There are two main types of blood fat: cholesterol and triglycerides. High cholesterol and triglycerides can increase your risk for heart disease, heart attack, or stroke in the future.

Types of Cholesterol:
• HDL - The good guy. HDL helps remove cholesterol from the artery walls. This can reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke.
• LDL - The bad guy. A large amount of LDL floating in our blood stream can lead to a buildup of plaque in our arteries. This can lead to a lack of blood flow and increase our risk for heart attack or stroke.
• Triglycerides - This is the most common type of cholesterol. High levels increase the risk for fatty build up in our arteries.
• Total Cholesterol - This is a combination of your HDL, LDL, and 20% of your triglycerides.

Normal levels of Cholesterol:
• HDL - Greater than 40 mg/dL for men and greater than 50 mg/dL for women
• LDL - Depending on your medical history normal can range from less than 160 to less than 100 mg/dL
• Triglycerides - Less than 150 mg/dL
• Total Cholesterol - Less than 200 mg/dL

Preventing High Cholesterol:
• NO Smoking
• Eat a heart healthy diet
• Focus on eating more fruits and vegetables to start. It is also important to reduce your intake of trans fat, saturated fat, red meats, sodium, and sweets.
• A great example of a heart healthy diet is the DASH diet.
• Talk to your Healthcare Provider about medications that might help lower your cholesterol
• Statins: A common medication prescribed for high cholesterol
• Exercise! The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity spread throughout the week.
• Maintain a healthy weight

How often should cholesterol be tested and how do I do it?
• The most common test for cholesterol is measured by a blood test following 9 to 12 hours of fasting.
• Adults that are healthy should get their cholesterol checked every 4 to 6 years.
• Women should start screening between the ages of 30-45 depending on her personal heart and family history.
• Men should start cholesterol screening between the ages of 25-35 based upon their personal heart and family history.
• The current goal for children and adolescents is to have their cholesterol checked between the ages of 9 and 11 and once again between the ages of 17 and 21.

Have a talk today with your health care provider and get your cholesterol checked!