**Ask WHY You Have High Cholesterol**

**By Dr. Ramona Warren**

Since the 1960s, we have been taught that cholesterol is “the enemy” and the main cause of heart disease, specifically coronary artery disease. However, cholesterol is NOT the villain. According to many recent studies, the belief that elevated cholesterol causes arterial plaque and leads to heart disease is a myth. Research reveals that a high total cholesterol level is just one factor (and not even the most important factor) that impacts your RISK of developing heart disease.

Cholesterol is a natural substance in the body, with up to 75 percent being produced by the liver. When you limit foods high in cholesterol, your body will increase its production of cholesterol because the body ***needs*** it. In fact, in a single day, your body can produce more cholesterol than you can eat. Cholesterol is vital to our health -- every cell membrane in the body contains cholesterol. Cholesterol is also important in our hormonal health, since estrogen, progesterone and testosterone, as well as the adrenal hormones, are synthesized from cholesterol. There are thousands of functions in the body that are dependent on cholesterol.

When your total cholesterol is over 200, many times a statin will be recommended. Statin drugs are the No. 1 selling drugs in the world. Global sales in 2009 were reported to be $11.4 billion, but these drugs carry many adverse side effects. One expert, Barbara H. Roberts, M.D., director of the Women's Cardiac Center at the Miriam Hospital in Providence, R.I. has been involved in many studies and has written *The Truth About Statins: Risks and Alternatives to Cholesterol-Lowering Drugs* and another book, *How to Keep From Breaking Your Heart: What Every Woman Needs to Know About Cardiovascular Disease*. Dr. Roberts states in an interview with the Huffington Post, “Every week in my practice I see patients with serious side effects to statins, and many did not need to be treated with statins in the first place. These side effects range from debilitating muscle and joint pain to transient global amnesia, neuropathy, cognitive dysfunction, fatigue and muscle weakness. Most of these symptoms subside or improve when they are taken off statins. There is even growing evidence of a statin link to Lou Gehrig’s disease.”

Rather than immediately reaching for a statin, it’s important to first look at the underlying cause of elevated cholesterol. Cholesterol does not just randomly increase, particularly if it has been in a normal range previously. Rather, cholesterol is a reflection of your lifestyle and how different systems in the body are functioning. A high cholesterol number can serve as a warning that there is something out of balance in the body.

When you correct the underlying cause of elevated cholesterol, you can naturally lower your cholesterol and improve your overall health. Three of the most common causes of elevated cholesterol are poor thyroid function, inflammation in the body and a diet high in refined carbohydrates.

Common symptoms of a low-functioning thyroid include:

* Fatigue
* Weight gain
* Hair loss
* Joint pain
* Dry and itchy skin
* Brain fog
* Elevated total cholesterol
* Elevated LDL

Standard blood work includes only the TSH levels to measure thyroid function. Often this number will be in the normal range and the patient is told their thyroid is normal, despite suffering from many classic thyroid symptoms.

A simple home test to help determine thyroid function is the Barnes Test, which measures resting body temperature. To perform this test, place a thermometer under your arm (in the arm pit) first thing in the morning before getting out of bed. Leave it there for 5 minutes, then record your temperature. Do this for 5 days. Your temperature should be at least 97.8 degrees. If it is consistently lower, this is an indication of a low-functioning thyroid gland, and it would be helpful to have a more extensive blood test that includes a complete thyroid panel.

Sometimes the blood work looks fine, but the patient still suffers with low thyroid symptoms. A doctor who does functional medicine will often run other tests including a Tissue Mineral Analysis, which looks at thyroid function at the cellular level rather than just in the blood to see if the thyroid hormone is getting through the cell membrane. When proper thyroid levels are restored in a hypothyroid patient, it can reduce high cholesterol levels and improve many symptoms and health problems.

Inflammation in the body, resulting from an increased intake of refined carbohydrates, can also lead to elevated cholesterol. Refined carbohydrates are high-glycemic foods that cause blood sugar to spike and increase insulin levels in the blood. These high insulin levels lead to inflammation. The underlying cause of most diseases, including heart disease, is a diet high in sugar and refined carbohydrates. Sugar causes many more problems in the body than cholesterol. To naturally reduce inflammation, and your overall cholesterol level, simply reduce high glycemic foods such as cereals, breads, fried foods, fast foods, and packaged or processed foods.

Choose a diet that incorporates a variety of colorful vegetables and lean meats, including blueberries, apples, tomatoes, nuts, seeds and turmeric. Taking a quality fish oil and niacin can also help to get your cholesterol levels in a healthy range. One other step that can help lower cholesterol is simply to take some steps -- get out and walk. Try for 30 minutes of walking at least 5 days a week.

These natural approaches can make a big difference in your overall cholesterol levels. Cholesterol is not the enemy. It is a natural substance our body needs. It is our diet and lifestyle that is at the root of the problem.