From The Wellness Center

HEALTH NEWS

Cholesterol Continued

Why should I care about cholesterol? High blood cholesterol is one of three main controllable risk factors for coronary heart disease. A risk factor is a habit, trait, or condition in a person that is associated with an increased chance (or risk) of developing a disease. The other two main controllable risk factors for coronary heart disease are high blood pressure and cigarette smoking. Any one of these risk factors increases an individual's chance of developing heart disease, and all three together may greatly increase heart disease risk, perhaps by ten times or more. Obesity and diabetes are other risk factors. Being a male or having a family history of premature heart disease will also add to an individual's risk of heart disease.

Genetic and animal studies have shown that elevated levels of blood cholesterol, whether caused by genetic defects or dietary excesses, lead to early development of hardening of the arteries and coronary heart disease. Scientific studies of large population groups (epidemiologic studies) have shown that people with high blood cholesterol have more chance of developing coronary heart disease than do people with lower levels of cholesterol, and that the chances of developing coronary heart disease increase in proportion to the amount the cholesterol is elevated, especially for values over 200 mg/dl (mg/dl = milligrams per deciliter). In the United States, people with a blood cholesterol of 240 mg/dl or higher have more than two times the risk of developing heart disease as do those with a level of under 200 mg/dl. About 25 percent of adults in the United States have blood cholesterol levels over 240 mg/dl and more than half of U.S. adults have levels over 200 mg/dl. Recently, blood cholesterol levels for adults have been classified as (1) desirable (less than 200 mg/dl), (2) borderline-high (200 to 239 mg/dl), and (3) high (240 mg/dl and above). These categories apply to all adults over age 20, regardless of age or sex, and are part of medical guidelines defined by the Adult Treatment Panel of the National Cholesterol Education Program in October 1987.

In adults, a total blood cholesterol level above 240 mg/dl warrants medical attention to help bring it down. However, levels above 200 mg/dl also increase the risk of heart disease and may require further evaluation, depending on whether other heart disease risk factors are present. When persons are evaluated for borderline-high blood cholesterol levels, other factors that increase their risk status for coronary heart disease are low HDL-cholesterol levels (below 35 mg/dl); advanced hardening of the arteries in the head, legs, feet, hands or arms; angina or other evidence of blockages in the arteries serving the heart; or a previous heart attack. These factors are considered in addition to the main heart disease risk factors mentioned earlier.

A physician can assess a person's risk for heart disease, offer advice on how to make dietary changes which are generally sufficient to lower blood cholesterol to an acceptable level, and monitor progress toward cholesterol reduction. Persons with very high blood cholesterol levels might also be prescribed a cholesterol-lowering drug.

From the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute Part II of II

USDA Gives Tips On Food Preparation For College Kids

FOOD SAFETY TIPS FOR COLLEGE FOOD SHOPPING AND COOKING

1. After grocery shopping, always take perishable food home quickly and refrigerate it within two hours. Don't stop by the library or visit a friend until this is done.
2. When using microwaves, follow product directions and plan for extra cooking time if you are in a dorm. Other equipment can drain current from the electrical circuit.
3. Leftover pizza, fried chicken, Chinese food, and other carry-outs should be refrigerated as soon as possible. Remember that perishable food should never be unrefrigerated more than two hours.
4. Never store foods on the window ledge even if the weather is cold (not even that pizza box). Buildings radiate heat, making the sill warmer than the outside temperature. And, using a metal box to protect food from birds and animals could act as an "oven" in direct sunlight.
5. "Care packages" of food from home are always welcome. But be sure to check any can or package labels to see if the products require refrigeration after opening.

WASHINGTON - Many college students use small microwave ovens or toaster-ovens to prepare food in dormitories. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Meat and Poultry Hotline gets many calls from parents and students with questions about the handling and storage of foods in dorms. Here are some sample questions and answers, with tips on safe food handling:

Q. Our dorm has a kitchen with a microwave on each floor. Often food prepared according to the printed directions is not cooked as thoroughly as I like it. What is wrong?

A. In a large building like a dorm, other electrical equipment such as personal computers, toaster-ovens and stereos can compete for current and reduce the electrical wattage of a microwave. A community oven may also be used more frequently than one at home. A microwave oven that has just cooked several foods often cooks slower than a cold oven. To compensate, set the oven for the maximum time given in the instructions, or add several seconds more cooking time.

Cover foods for cooking in a microwave. Stir or rearrange food, and rotate the dish during cooking. If your oven has a temperature probe, use it or a meat thermometer to check internal temperatures of meat and poultry. To avoid food-safety hazards, red meat should be cooked to 160 degrees F; poultry to 180 degrees F. Juices should run clear.

Remember that microwave foods continue to cook after they are removed from the oven, so allow foods to stand before they are eaten.

Q. I am living off campus this year. My two roommates and I will be preparing our own meals. We know how to cook and we plan to buy healthy food. What else do we need to know to make this a successful venture and avoid food-safety problems?

A. When shopping, buy perishable foods last and get them home quickly. Never leave perishable food in a hot car while you run other errands. Refrigerate perishables as soon as you get home. Freeze any fresh meat, fish or poultry you won't use in the next few days.

Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator - not on the counter. Wash your hands before preparing foods. Always clean dishtowels and sponges. Wash cutting boards and utensils in hot, soapy water. Use a plastic - not wooden - cutting board. Don't allow raw meat or poultry to drip on other foods.

Cook food thoroughly. Never partially cook food. Finally, if you feel food has not been handled safely, throw it out.

Q. I frequently send "care packages" to my son at college. What other foods besides cookies, crackers and candy can I send safely?

A. For a change of pace, send a sampling of the new shelf-stable microwave entrees now available in supermarkets. They are not frozen and keep fresh without refrigeration for more than 18 months. More than a dozen different entrees are available - from chili, roast beef and lasagna to more exotic linguini with clam sauce. Your son can stack them on the bookcase and use them as needed.

Loaf cakes, like banana bread, carrot, applesauce or sour-cream cakes, ship well if wrapped in aluminum foil and packed in a can or box.

Packages of hard or processed cheese and some sausages like beef sticks, dry salami and pepperoni don't need to be refrigerated. These mail well too. Check the label carefully for handling instructions.

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