



# A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

## Cholesterol Check

National Cholesterol Education Month — United States, 2015

Recorded: September 8, 2015; posted: September 10, 2015

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Heart disease and stroke are among the leading causes of death in the U.S. One of the main risk factors is high blood cholesterol.

Dr. Carla Mercado is a researcher with CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention. She's joining us today to discuss the importance a healthy diet and regular screening to prevent high blood cholesterol. Welcome to the show, Carla.

[Dr. Mercado] Thank you. Thank you for inviting me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Carla, let's start with what is cholesterol and how does it affect our bodies?

[Dr. Mercado] Cholesterol's a waxy, fat-like substance that our bodies make or we can also get it from the foods we eat. Our bodies need cholesterol, but if there's too much LDL cholesterol, or bad cholesterol, it can build up in our blood vessels, making it hard for blood to flow and forming blockages that ultimately lead to heart disease or stroke.

[Dr. Gaynes] How many adults in the U.S. may require treatment for high cholesterol?

[Dr. Mercado] Unfortunately, this is very common. Seventy eight million U.S. adults can benefit from or are currently taking cholesterol-lowering medications. However, people who are at risk for a cardiovascular event who need to control their cholesterol—45 percent of them are not taking medication.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the symptoms of high cholesterol?

[Dr. Mercado] High cholesterol typically doesn't have signs or symptoms so many people don't realize that their cholesterol levels are high. Screening is key to detection.

[Dr. Gaynes] Carla, how often should we get screened for cholesterol?

[Dr. Mercado] Since the frequency of having your cholesterol checked depends on your risk for heart disease, talk to your doctor about what's best for you.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some ways we can prevent the accumulation of bad cholesterol?

[Dr. Mercado] The key is to maintain a healthy lifestyle. There are four things that you can do. First, you have to eat healthy. A diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables; avoid trans fats, which may be in baked goods or margarine; and reduce the amount of saturated fats that you eat, which come from animal products like cheese or fatty meats. Second, be physically active on a regular basis, such as brisk

walking, swimming, cycling, or even gardening. It's important to maintain a healthy weight because being overweight or obese can raise your cholesterol levels. Third, if you smoke, quit. Quitting smoking will help lower your cholesterol. If you don't smoke, don't start. And finally, if you are taking medications to treat high cholesterol, take the medication as instructed.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about preventing high blood cholesterol?

[Dr. Mercado] Go to [cdc.gov/cholesterol](http://cdc.gov/cholesterol).

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Carla. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Carla Mercado about the importance of controlling our blood cholesterol.

Remember, regular cholesterol screening can determine if you're at risk for a heart attack or stroke, so talk with your health care provider.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.