

Would Children/Adolescents put up with Cholesterol?

When it comes to their kids, many parents don't even think about cholesterol. But high levels of cholesterol are known to be a major factor contributing to heart disease and strokes, and the latest medical research shows coronary artery disease has its roots in childhood.

In the past few years, studies have shown a dramatic increase in obesity in children and the problems that result from being overweight. And some pediatricians report seeing a significant increase in the number of

children with elevated cholesterol levels than they did years ago.

Three major factors contribute to high cholesterol levels:

- diet - a diet high in fats, particularly saturated and trans fats, which are common in baked treats and commercial snack products
- heredity - having parents or a parent with high cholesterol
- obesity - related to both diet and lack of exercise

Current recommendations encourage cholesterol screening in only those children who are at risk for having high cholesterol.

Your child's doctor can use a simple blood test to tell you if your child's cholesterol is too high. According to the American Heart Association, the ranges of total cholesterol for chil-

Cholesterol levels in children and adolescents 2-19 years old

| Category | Total Cholesterol (mg/dL) |
|--|---------------------------|
| Acceptable | less than 170 |
| Borderline | 170-199 |
| High | 200 or greater |
| HDL levels should be greater than or equal to 35 mg/dL and triglycerides should be less than or equal to 150 mg/dL | |

dren 2 years to 19 years old are:

If the results are considered "acceptable," then your child should be screened every 5 years. If your child's total cholesterol is 170 or higher, then your child's doctor will probably have your child fast for 12 hours and then repeat the test (called fasting cholesterol). If your child's initial cholesterol level is greater than 200, then your child's doctor will order both fasting cholesterol and a lipoprotein analysis (which would identify your child's HDL and LDL levels).

Although it's believed that the problems caused by high cholesterol can start in childhood, it still isn't entirely clear what high cholesterol levels indicate for a child. Therefore, the recommendations focus primarily on good eating and exercise behaviors for everyone, but especially those who have higher cholesterol and lipoproteins.

If your child is active, eats healthy foods, doesn't have a family history of high cholesterol, and isn't overweight, you probably don't have much cause for concern.