

## CHOLESTEROL

## CHOLESTEROL: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

**WE'VE** all heard of cholesterol, but what is it all about?

Cholesterol has been in the spotlight for its bad reputation and for good reason: the higher your blood values, the greater your cardiovascular risk. But not everything is bad.

The human body needs cholesterol as it is an important lipid (i.e. fat). Not only does it participate in cell functioning, it also forms vitamin D and bile acids. It is additionally necessary for producing hormones, such as testosterone and oestrogen. It is, therefore, so important that about 80% of the cholesterol in the human body is produced by the liver. That is, only about 20% comes from what we eat.

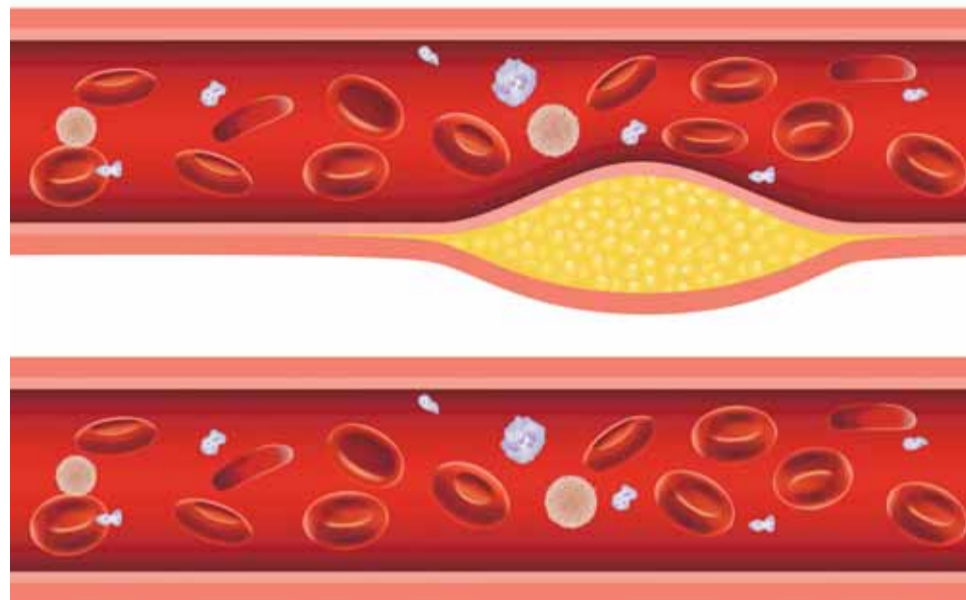
That is why, when cholesterol levels are high, it is important to control one's

diet. If our body already produces cholesterol and there is an excess, food will only increase its levels even more.

When a person has high body lipid values, they are said to have dyslipidaemia. Dyslipidaemia is a general term that can refer to the different lipids in the body. On the other hand, when we speak only of high cholesterol values, dyslipidaemia is then given a specific name, hypercholesterolemia.

#### The different types of cholesterol

You will certainly have heard of "good" and "bad" cholesterol whenever analysis are mentioned. We normally think of different types of cholesterol, but it's not that straightforward. For the purpose of diagnosis and treatment,



it is worth thinking about "types". However, in practical terms, what varies in these "types" is not the cholesterol itself, but the way it travels throughout the body and what that tells us.

Since cholesterol is a fat and does not mix with blood, it cannot circulate in the bloodstream on its own:

it needs a "means of transport". So, to transport it (as well as other lipids), the body creates particles made up of proteins that can easily mix with blood. These particles are called lipoproteins and they are the ones that transport cholesterol throughout the body. However, these transporters

– lipoproteins – can have different sizes, characteristics and functions.

#### LDL-cholesterol (or "bad")

LDL stands for low-density lipoproteins, which are essentially composed of cholesterol (the components of triglycerides have already

#### HDL-cholesterol (or "good")

HDL stands for high-density lipoproteins and is often referred to as "good" cholesterol. While in the previous situations LDL lipoproteins distribute cholesterol throughout the body, HDL picks up excess cholesterol in the blood and transports it back to the liver where it is broken down and removed from the body. Therefore, having higher HDL-cholesterol values means that more cholesterol is being eliminated.

Article submitted by the HPA Health Group

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