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Cholesterol Awareness

What is cholesterol? – It may surprise you to know that cholesterol itself is not bad. In fact, cholesterol is an important substance made by our liver to make nutrients, build cells and aid digestion. Because it's also found in many foods, we can easily consume more cholesterol than our bodies need. High levels of cholesterol increase your risk of developing atherosclerosis (hardened arteries), coronary artery disease and other life-threatening complications.

Cholesterol is a fatty, waxy substance that circulates throughout our bloodstream. Like oil and water, cholesterol and blood do not mix, meaning the cholesterol does not dissolve. Instead it is carried to and from cells in packages called "lipoproteins" which, in large quantities, can build up in artery walls. Some lipids are good and some are bad. LDL (low-density lipoproteins), also called "bad cholesterol", is responsible for carrying cholesterol and depositing it throughout the body. An LDL less than 100 mg/dL is optimal. HDL (high-density lipoproteins), referred to as "good cholesterol", shuttles the cholesterol back to the liver for recycling so it doesn't build up in the bloodstream. HDL should be greater than 40 for men, and 50 for women. Triglycerides are a type of fat in the bloodstream that can be stored in the body and if levels are too high can collect in the arteries of the heart. Normal triglyceride levels are below 150. LDL, HDL, and triglycerides make up your total cholesterol. Your total cholesterol should be less than 200 mg/dL.

Keeping cholesterol in check – Over 65 million Americans have high cholesterol, and because there are no symptoms, many people don't even know it. If you have high cholesterol, take heart. There are many things you can do to lower your levels and stay healthy.

- **Eat for good health:** Good nutrition starts with a good plan. Adopt a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and poultry (including fish at least twice a week), and low fat dairy products. Avoid saturated and trans fats, which are often found in packaged foods.
- **Get moving:** Thirty minutes of moderate-level physical activity on most days of the week can lower your LDL (bad) cholesterol and raise your HDL (good) cholesterol levels. Choose to walk, bike, swim, even dance!
- **Maintain a healthy weight:** Eating right and exercising can help keep your weight down, which is important for lowering your cholesterol and your risk for heart disease.
- **Practice good habits:** If you smoke, it's time to quit! Smoking injures blood vessels and promotes the artery hardening process.

It is recommended that you have your cholesterol checked once every five years after the age of 20. If it's been awhile since your last screening, now is a great time to talk to your doctor about scheduling this simple blood test. You'll be glad you did!

Keep your cholesterol in check with WebMD!

Start tracking important numbers like cholesterol by logging onto **MyBlueService** from www.bcbsfl.com. Access the **Living Healthy** tab and select **Track My Health from WebMD**.



The Benefits of Berries

Fresh berries reach their peak during the warmer months. Each berry's burst of juicy deliciousness carries antioxidants, vitamins C and E, riboflavin and fiber that work to fight obesity, protect brain function and promote urinary health. The red, blue, and purple pigments in berries also help our bodies detoxify, repair damaged DNA, fight cancer, and help lower LDL, or "bad" cholesterol, levels. Each berry offers not only a unique flavor and color, but also a particular health protection.

- **Black Raspberries:** The dark purple member of the raspberry family grows on low shrubs and ripens in summer. This member of the berry corps helps fight oral, esophageal, and colon cancer.
- **Blackberries and Marion berries:** Members of the rose family, these berries grow on shrubs and ripen in mid-to-late summer. Both help digestion and prevent salmonella growth.
- **Blueberries:** Powerhouse blueberries also grow on low shrubs and generally ripen in early summer. This renowned berry offers whole-body protection against many diseases and aging.
- **Cherries:** Sour cherries ripen in early summer, while sweet cherries reach their peak later in summer. Both types help reduce inflammation, especially in occurrences with gout.
- **Grapes:** Dark purple Concord grapes, often found in home gardens or at farmer's markets, ripen in the fall. Their resveratrol content is a key help in combating the effects of aging.
- **Strawberries:** These delicious favorites ripen throughout the year in various parts of the country. Strawberries help fight breast and cervical cancers.

Home gardeners who grow berries know exactly what fertilizers and natural pesticides have been placed in or on them. Buying organic berries at the local farmer's market or grocery store ensures that the health benefits of fresh berries are not undercut by infiltrated pesticides or anti-fungal chemicals. Right before serving, berries may be gently rinsed, and then patted completely dry. They will keep well in the refrigerator as long as they are not crowded together. Summer berries can star in cool treats throughout the day. At breakfast, they're a welcome wakeup flavor for cereal or yogurt. As a snack, they're perfect whether eaten by the handful or turned into frozen yogurt pops. Pairing berries with low-fat ingredients, whole grains, fresh produce and natural sweeteners makes for fast, fresh, and fabulous summer dishes that keep us cool all summer long.

Reminder.....Have you selected your dentist?

If you are currently enrolled in Humana Dental's DMO plan and have not yet selected a Primary Care Dentist (PCD), please take the time to get a PCD assigned for you and your family. You may access www.humanadental.com for a list of dentists or call a Humana Customer Care Specialist at 1-800-233-4013 for the names and addresses of dentists near you. The Customer Care Specialist can help you update your plan with the required information and send new identification cards.