

HOUSE CALL

KelseyCare Advantage

April 2015

CLEARING UP CHOLESTEROL CONFUSION: What's Good? What's Bad?

Most of you know someone who has had a heart attack or stroke – the number 1 and number 4 killers in the United States. Often these events are related to cholesterol. Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that exists throughout the body, and at normal levels, it plays an important role in how our body works. About 25% of our cholesterol comes from animal-based foods like eggs, meat and cheese. And, it's important to know that cholesterol is **not** all bad!

What exactly is bad cholesterol vs. good cholesterol? Cholesterol is carried to and from our cells by low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and high-density lipoprotein (HDL). LDL is considered the “bad” cholesterol because it adds to plaque – a thick, hard build-up that can clog arteries and make them less flexible. HDL is considered the “good” cholesterol because it helps remove LDL cholesterol from the arteries and protects the lining from developing plaque. If cholesterol levels get too high; it can put us at risk of a heart attack, heart disease, or stroke.

New guidelines have been issued by the American Heart Association to help physicians work with patients

to lower ‘bad’ cholesterol and manage the cholesterol numbers of people with certain chronic conditions. “Kelsey-Seybold Clinic utilizes the latest information in helping patients maintain proper cholesterol levels,” says Dr. Donnie Aga, KelseyCare Advantage Medical Director. “These new guidelines will be helpful in developing treatment plans designed to manage each patient’s overall health.”

The new guidelines outline other factors that contribute to heart attack and stroke. Age, gender, ethnicity, and family history are all taken into consideration. Health-related issues like smoking, obesity, lack of exercise, drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, blood pressure and diabetes also put you at risk. “Cholesterol lowering statin drugs may be prescribed to patients with these risk factors to assist them in lowering the amount of cholesterol circulating in the blood” explains Dr. Aga.

The new guidelines recommend statins for the following groups:

- Patients without cardiovascular



disease, 40 to 75 years old who have a 7.5 percent or higher risk for having a heart attack or stroke within 10 years;

- Patients of any age with a history of a cardiovascular event (heart attack, stroke, stable or unstable angina, peripheral artery disease, etc.);
- Patients 21 and older with a high level of LDL cholesterol (190 mg/dL or higher);
- Patients with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, ages 40 to 75.

To learn if you are at risk, Dr. Aga recommends discussing your cholesterol levels during your next visit with your Kelsey-Seybold doctor.

TIPS FOR SAFE TRAVEL

Spring has sprung, and if you plan to take a cruise or travel anywhere outside the United States, it's important to keep good health and personal safety in mind before you pack a single piece of clothing.

Try to see a doctor 4 to 6 weeks before setting out on your travels, so any medical problems can be treated and there's enough time for immunizations (shots) to take effect. You'll want to tell your doctor where you're going, for how long, and what you'll be doing there, and also discuss illnesses you may have had and medicines you take since that affects medical

decisions. In addition to providing vaccines, medicine, and advice for staying healthy, a doctor can give you a physical to make sure you're fit to travel.

Keep your body's limits in mind when planning a trip. Seniors with heart disease, for example, might want to avoid overdoing it. Some may also have a hard time getting over jet lag and motion sickness and should take those factors into account, too.

Before traveling, seniors need information about where they're headed that could affect their health. Some countries in Africa have been dealing with the deadly Ebola virus, for example, but altitude and climate are also concerns. Be aware of destinations that are prone to natural disasters, like earthquakes and hurricanes, since seniors may have more problems in extreme situations.

The American Academy of Family Physicians estimates that at least one-third of people who travel abroad experience diarrhea or upper-respiratory infections.

"Diarrhea is common, no matter where one travels, but it is more likely to be infectious and interrupt travel plans in less developed areas," says Dr. Melanie Mouzoon, Managing Physician for Immunization Practices and Travel Medicine at Kelsey-Seybold Clinic.

Dr. Mouzoon also suggests being careful when eating food you don't recognize. She says if you are unsure about how food might affect your health, eat something else. Also, drink plenty of bottled water. Water in certain countries might not be safe to drink. Stick to

boiled or bottled water throughout your trip to avoid dehydration.

Many make the mistake of thinking they won't get sick if traveling back to where they were born. "People returning to their native country believe they are not at risk when visiting home," says Dr. Mouzoon. "They can develop serious illnesses such as typhoid fever and malaria. Flu is common among travelers, and circulates in the tropics year-round and in the southern hemisphere during our 'summer' months."

Although nasty infections make the news, injury is the most common cause of death among travelers. Seniors can lower the risk of being seriously hurt by following these guidelines:

- Always wear a seatbelt.
- Don't ride in cars after dark in developing countries.
- Avoid small, local planes.
- Don't travel at night in questionable areas.

Consider buying travel health insurance in case of injury or illness overseas. Many health plans, including Medicare, won't pay for services received outside the United States. Seniors planning travel to remote areas should consider purchasing evacuation insurance, which covers emergency transportation to a qualified hospital.

For more information on healthy travel, visit www.cdc.gov/travel.

Also, Kelsey-Seybold Clinic offers a full array of Travel Medicine services. Call 713-442-TRIP for more information.

Travel Tips

- ✓ See a doctor 4 to 6 weeks before traveling to allow vaccines to work and to gather important health information
- ✓ Know your physical limitations and plan your travel accordingly
- ✓ Be aware of health and natural disaster risks at your destination(s)
- ✓ Only eat foods you recognize
- ✓ Drink boiled or bottled water only
- ✓ Use seatbelts and other safe travel measures
- ✓ Consider buying travel health insurance

STAYING CONNECTED TO KELSEYCARE ADVANTAGE

KelseyCare Advantage uses many ways to keep you updated with important plan information as well as tips for healthy living.

For the last couple of years we've offered members the option of putting a stop to the mail we send through the U.S. Postal Service and letting you sign up for convenient and secure email communication. We have had a great response, which has also helped us conserve resources such as paper and postage. The good news is it's not too late if you'd like to make the switch from paper to electronic delivery. Just call KelseyCare Advantage Member Services at 713-442-4878 during regular business hours and let the representative know you prefer to receive plan materials through email or sign up on our website, www.kelseycareadvantage.com.

Are you using MyKelseyOnline? MKO is a secure, convenient and immediate way for Kelsey-Seybold Clinic patients to access important patient information any time of day or night. Think of it as an electronic resource center. And it's free. You can sign up for MKO during your next appointment with a Kelsey-Seybold doctor. Just ask your Kelsey-Seybold nurse for assistance.

Another resource available to you wherever you have a computer or portable electronic device is the KelseyCare Advantage website, www.kelseycareadvantage.com. You can find information about doctors and specialists through the Kelsey-Seybold Clinic family, sign

up to attend member meetings and much, much more. At the top of every page of the site are links to the Live Chat in case you have any questions or concerns that we can address and a Contact Us page that lets you reach out to us online or by phone.

And then there's social media, also available wherever you have a computer, smartphone or other portable device. Be sure to like the KelseyCare Advantage Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/KelseyCareAdvantage>) and follow the KelseyCare Advantage Twitter account (@KCA_Medicare) for updates throughout each week

about medical issues affecting seniors, Medicare in general, member meetings, events and other important health information. Again, these sites give you convenient channels for interacting with us, seeing what others are talking about, and keeping up with KelseyCare Advantage.

We hope you will take advantage of any or all of the communication services we've talked about in this article. That way you know everything that is going on with your plan and you have convenient ways to get in touch with us.



IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS TO REMEMBER

For personalized assistance with physician selection, benefits issues, billing questions, please call
KelseyCare Advantage Concierge
713-442-9540

To speak with a **pharmacist** on the KelseyCare Advantage team, please call: **713-442-4820**.
The pharmacy team can review all of your medications and help you identify cost saving opportunities.

Fraud, Waste and Abuse Hotline: **713-442-9595**