

## Cholesterol Check: Are Your Numbers Where They Should Be?

With New Year's resolutions around the corner, the big one that comes to mind is weight loss. When looking at improving your health and not just your physical appearance, there are many benefits with even a 7-10% weight loss. Reaching and maintaining a healthy body weight can reduce or prevent high cholesterol and triglyceride levels, lower blood pressure, prevent or improve diabetes, improve sleep apnea, reduce knee pain and raise energy levels. In addition, maintaining a healthy body composition reduces the risk of obesity and the complications that can occur, including the development of high cholesterol and diabetes, all while keeping you fit to fight.

High cholesterol is an indicator of a higher risk for heart disease, including heart attack and stroke. A cholesterol test will check total cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, and triglycerides (blood fats). High triglyceride levels are often found in individuals with heart disease or diabetes. Heart disease risk does have a genetic component, but staying within the levels listed below lowers your risk level considerably.

Total cholesterol: < 200 mg/dL

HDL (good) cholesterol: >40 mg/dL

LDL (bad) cholesterol: <130 mg/dL

Triglycerides: <150 mg/dL

It's possible to manage cholesterol through lifestyle changes, including changes in the foods you eat and becoming more active. Increasing your consumption of foods with soluble fiber, including fruits and vegetables, beans, and whole grains, such as oats and barley, can help lower your LDL. Limiting your saturated fats (those found in animal products) will also help lower your LDL. Including small amounts of healthy fats (salmon, olive oil, avocados, nuts) can help raise HDL, which helps protect your heart.

Exercise can decrease the risk of heart disease by increasing HDL and decreasing LDL. A minimum of 30 minutes of moderate intensity is recommended most days of the week. If you are new to exercise, try taking a walk each day for 10 minutes and build up in time and duration as you get stronger. Exercise also increases energy levels, decreases stress, and assists with weight management.

Weight loss can help lower your total cholesterol. Obesity is an independent risk factor for heart disease, especially when body fat is carried around your midsection. Even losing 5 or 10 pounds can reduce your risk factors for heart disease and diabetes, as well as reducing the burden on your joints.

Ready to make some changes? Then join Fairchild's Wingman Health Challenge from January 7 – March 29. This 12 week lifestyle change program for teams of 2 will assess body composition changes with pre and post body fat measurements in the Bod Pod, cholesterol checks, bi-weekly weigh-ins, and the Fitness Center and HAWC will provide support through fitness and nutrition activities. Registration will be held December 17 – January 7. Contact the Fitness Center at 247-2791 or the HAWC at 247-5590 for more information.