

# What You Need to Know Familial Hypercholesterolemia (FH)

## What is Familial Hypercholesterolemia (FH)?

- FH is an inherited high blood cholesterol condition. If a parent has the FH gene, there is a 50% chance that their child will have FH. About 1 in 500 people has FH.
- With FH, a person's liver cannot clear cholesterol out of the body in the usual way. People with FH have extremely high LDL (bad) blood cholesterol levels even as children.
- High blood cholesterol levels can lead to blocked arteries which can cause a heart attack, stroke or other circulation problems. This can happen at a young age in people who have FH.
- It is important that FH is found early to prevent the build-up of cholesterol in the arteries and damage to blood vessels.

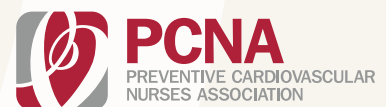


## Reasons you may need to be tested for FH

- If your "bad" cholesterol, or LDL level, is higher than 5.0mmol/L, FH should be suspected. In children or teenagers, an LDL level of 3.5 mmol/L or greater is a reason for further testing.
- If you or other family members have had a heart attack or a stroke at a young age, such as in their 20s, 30s, 40s or 50s.
- If your nurse or doctor can detect signs of cholesterol deposits around your eyes, heels, or elbows when they examine you.

## If You Have FH: What You Can Do

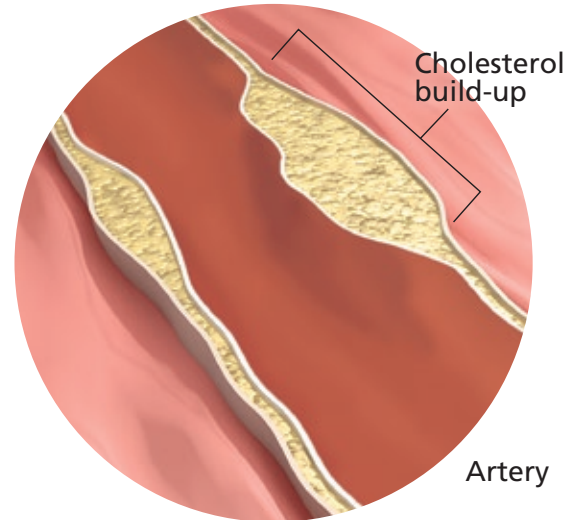
- Ask questions if there is something you don't understand.
- Take your prescribed medicines regularly. Cholesterol-lowering medicines can prevent heart attacks, strokes, and other circulation problems.
- If you smoke cigarettes, ask for help in quitting.
- Ask your nurse or doctor to help you make a plan for exercise.
- Talk to your nurse or doctor about whether you need an appointment with a lipid (cholesterol) specialist.
- Tell your immediate family members that you have FH and ask that they have their cholesterol levels checked. Have your children tested for FH.
- Ask your nurse or doctor about scheduling an appointment with a dietician (if necessary).



# Details About FH

## How is FH treated?

- **Cholesterol-lowering medicine** is a very important part of treating FH and lowering the risk of early heart disease. Research is ongoing to find new treatment options. **Although very important, healthy diet and physical activity alone cannot lower blood cholesterol levels enough in people with FH.**
- If you have FH, controlling your other risk factors for heart disease is important. Do not smoke cigarettes. Have your blood pressure checked. Take your prescribed blood pressure medicine regularly. Strive for a healthy weight, and take part in regular physical activity.
- If you have FH, your nurse and doctor will talk to you about heart-healthy eating. A dietitian can give you expert advice and good tips about what kinds of foods to eat and ways to make healthy changes.



## If I have FH, what does this mean for my family?

- If you have FH, your children, parents, brothers and sisters (“first degree relatives”) each have a 50% chance of having FH. They should be checked for FH, because the sooner FH is found, the sooner treatment to prevent heart disease can be started.

## Important Things to Remember about FH

- FH is not curable, but is easily treatable. You can lead a full and normal life.
- If you have FH, you will need regular medical follow-up and prescription medicines to lower your blood cholesterol for your lifetime.
- A healthy diet and physical activity, while important, are **not enough** to lower your cholesterol level if you have FH.
- **Treating your blood cholesterol level and other heart disease risk factors will lower your risk of heart attack, stroke, and other circulation problems.**

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### Learn More About FH Online

- FH Canada: [www.fhcanada.net](http://www.fhcanada.net)
- Canadian Cardiovascular Society: [www.ccs.ca](http://www.ccs.ca)
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada: [www.heartandstroke.com](http://www.heartandstroke.com)
- Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association: [www.pcna.net/patients/familial-hypercholesterolemia](http://www.pcna.net/patients/familial-hypercholesterolemia)
- The Foundation of the National Lipid Association: [www.learnyourlipids.com](http://www.learnyourlipids.com)

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- The Canadian Council of Cardiovascular Nurses (CCCN)



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