



Managing High Cholesterol

As your cholesterol rises, so does your risk for heart disease. That's why it's important to keep your cholesterol controlled and your heart healthy with diet, exercise and medication. By combining diet and exercise with medication you can lower your cholesterol. If your cholesterol medication causes side effects, tell your doctor or pharmacist right away. Amber Specialty Pharmacy is here to help you manage all aspects of your condition, including side effects.

The following are tips for managing the medication side effects.



Allergic Reaction

Even though it's rare, some people may have a very bad reaction to a medication. Signs of an allergic reaction include:

- Rash
- Hives
- Itching
- Red, swollen, blistered or peeling skin
- Wheezing or tightness in the chest and throat
- Trouble breathing
- Swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue or throat

If you are experiencing these symptoms, seek emergency help right away.

Injection Site Reaction

If you inject your medication, you may experience a mild injection site reaction. This can be mild swelling, redness, itching and/or pain at the injection site. If you are experiencing a severe reaction, contact your doctor right away.

- ▶ If your nurse or pharmacist says it's okay, allow your medication to warm to room temperature before injecting. Don't use a heat source like warm water or a microwave to warm the medication.

Injection Site Reaction Continued...

- ▶ Simply take it out of the refrigerator about 20-30 minutes before injecting. Don't return the medication to the refrigerator once it has warmed to room temperature.
- ▶ After cleaning the site with alcohol wipes, let the skin dry. Do not blow on the skin to dry the alcohol. Evaporation is how alcohol disinfects surfaces. Please allow the area to evaporate and dry completely. This also reduces needle stings and allows the alcohol to work properly.
- ▶ Rotate injection sites. Move each injection several inches away from the previous injection site. Try writing down where injections are given each day instead of relying on your memory.
- ▶ If you have pain when injecting, apply ice to the injection site for 30-60 seconds before cleaning the site and injecting the medication.
- ▶ Avoid injection sites that are tender, reddened, scarred or bruised.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor if the injection site reaction lasts more than 24-48 hours or if you have signs of infection.

Nausea, Vomiting and Dehydration

Your cholesterol medication may make you feel nauseous. Described as feeling sick to the stomach, nausea can range from mild discomfort to the urge to vomit. Instead of eating three big meals, eat small meals throughout the day. Having an empty stomach or eating too much can cause discomfort. Vomiting can also lead to dehydration. Be sure to drink enough water each day. It's key to find out what makes you nauseous and take steps to control it.

- ▶ Drink and eat slowly.
- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ▶ Drink peppermint, chamomile or ginger tea.
- ▶ Eat foods at room temperature.
- ▶ Avoid foods or food odors that may make you nauseous.
- ▶ Avoid greasy, fried or spicy foods.
- ▶ Try to get plenty of rest.
- ▶ Add a slice of lemon, lime, mint or cucumber to your water for flavor.

Diarrhea and Constipation

Some people experience diarrhea or constipation as a side effect of their medication. Follow the tips below to help. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about medications that you can take to help relieve these symptoms. Tell your doctor if your symptoms don't improve or become severe.

For Diarrhea

- ▶ Eat small meals.
- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids — water, sports drinks and juices at room temperature work best.
- ▶ Avoid foods that may upset your stomach, like milk products, spicy or fried foods and soda.
- ▶ Eat foods low in fiber, like white bread, eggs, rice, potatoes, cooked fish and chicken until the diarrhea resolves.
- ▶ If it's okay with your doctor, take an anti-diarrhea medication.

For Constipation

- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ▶ Increase your fiber intake.
- ▶ Exercise most days of the week. Check with your doctor to see if you are healthy enough to start an exercise program.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor about medications that relieve constipation.

Bloating

Your medication may make your stomach feel bloated or full. If you experience pain or if your bloating feels severe, tell your doctor.

- ▶ Eat small meals.
- ▶ Limit fatty foods in your diet.
- ▶ Limit bloat-causing foods such as beans, lentils, broccoli, cabbage and salty foods.
- ▶ Drink and eat slowly.

Muscle Aches

You may experience muscle aches as a side effect of your medication. Call your doctor right away if you have muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness that is not normal (with or without fever), or if you have muscle pain that persist after your doctor has told you to stop taking a drug,



Liver Problems

A rare but serious side effect may include liver problems. Call your doctor right away if you have dark urine, light-colored stools, or yellow skin or eyes. You may also feel tired or have a low appetite.

Trouble Sleeping

Sometimes your cholesterol medication can make it hard to sleep. Getting enough sleep can help you manage stress and have enough energy for exercise. It's important to tell your doctor if you aren't getting enough sleep

- ▶ Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Maintaining a routine before bed may help you fall asleep faster.
- ▶ Try a relaxing activity before bed, like reading or taking a bubble bath.
- ▶ Avoid naps.
- ▶ Make sure you exercise each day. Avoid strenuous exercise close to bedtime as it may make it more difficult to fall asleep.
- ▶ Sleep in a quiet, dark room.
- ▶ Make sure your mattress and pillows are supportive.
- ▶ Your doctor may recommend medication to help you sleep.

Headaches

Some people may experience headaches as a side effect of their medication.

- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ▶ Apply a hot or cold compress to your head or neck.
- ▶ Rest in a quiet, dark room.
- ▶ Try massage or gentle neck stretches.
- ▶ Ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter pain medication.

Cold-like Symptoms

You may experience cold-like symptoms, depending on your medication. This includes fever, runny or stuffy nose, sneezing or coughing. You may also experience a sore throat. Usually, these side effects occur shortly after taking your medication and can last for a few days. Talk with your doctor about different medications that may be helpful in relieving some of these side effects. If your symptoms do not improve, let your doctor know.

- ▶ If your medication is injected, warm it to body temperature before taking it.
 - ▶ Take your medication before bed to sleep through the discomfort.
 - ▶ Drink plenty of water.
 - ▶ Eat a healthy diet.
 - ▶ Get enough rest and take time to relax.
 - ▶ Limit caffeine.
 - ▶ Drink hot tea to soothe throat irritation.
-



FAQs

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in all of the cells of your body and in certain foods. Your body needs some cholesterol to function and makes all of the cholesterol it needs to function. Additional cholesterol is found in meat, poultry and full-fat dairy products. If you eat too much cholesterol it can build up in your bloodstream, eventually causing plaque to form in your arteries (the blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to the rest of your body).

LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol is part of your total cholesterol. LDL cholesterol is known as the “bad” cholesterol. High levels of this cholesterol can lead to plaque. Plaque can narrow your arteries and make it harder for your heart to circulate blood throughout your body.

HDL (high-density lipoprotein), is considered “good” cholesterol and helps remove other forms of cholesterol from the body. High levels of HDL cholesterol can lower your risk for heart disease and stroke.

Why should I worry about cholesterol?

Plaque is bad because it can build up or break off and partially or completely block blood flow. If blood flow is blocked in an artery that feeds the brain, it causes a stroke. If blood flow is blocked in an artery that feeds the heart, it causes a heart attack. People with high cholesterol have a higher risk for heart disease compared to people with a normal level. People with high cholesterol often feel no symptoms. That’s why it’s important to have your cholesterol checked often by your doctor.

How much cholesterol is too much?

Your total cholesterol level is the overall amount of cholesterol found in your blood. It consists of low-density lipoproteins (LDL) and high-density lipoproteins (HDL).

A good total cholesterol number is less than 200. Anything 240 or higher is considered high. People with other risk factors for heart disease or who have already experienced a serious event related to high cholesterol may have an even lower goal for their cholesterol. Your doctor will also check your LDL cholesterol levels because high levels can lead to plaque buildup. Talk to your doctor to see what a good cholesterol goal is for you.

Having a healthy cholesterol level lowers your chances of heart disease or having a stroke. You should have your cholesterol checked yearly or more frequently if you have high cholesterol numbers. This is done by a simple blood test.

What causes high cholesterol?

Your cholesterol can be high due to multiple reasons. High cholesterol can run in families. Your age can also affect your cholesterol level. Diet is another factor that causes high cholesterol. Cholesterol is found in meat, poultry and full-fat dairy foods. Saturated and trans fats also raise your cholesterol level and are found in many processed foods. If you take medication for your cholesterol, you should still eat a healthy diet.

Being overweight and not exercising can raise your cholesterol however, people who exercise and are not overweight can still have high cholesterol. That’s why it’s important to have yours checked even if you have a healthy weight.

How can I lower my cholesterol?

Eating a heart-healthy diet can lower your cholesterol. This includes eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, poultry, fish and nuts. You should limit red meat and sugary foods and drinks. If diet and exercise don’t lower your cholesterol enough, your doctor may have you take medication.

Quitting smoking can also help improve your cholesterol. Exercise is also another good way to lower your cholesterol. Thirty minutes of aerobic exercise five times a week can help lower your cholesterol. This includes activities like brisk walking, swimming, bicycling or dancing.

How do I manage Medication side effects?

Medication can affect each patient differently. Amber Specialty Pharmacy works with patients to help manage any side effects that occur. It’s important to discuss any side effects with your pharmacist or doctor right away. For more information, please refer to the “Promises” patient education piece, “Managing High Cholesterol Medications.”



Amber Specialty Pharmacy is here to help.

We offer guidance and support through our dedicated team of healthcare experts. From the beginning, we help you with the enrollment process and review your insurance coverage. We explore financial assistance opportunities to help you lower your medication costs whenever possible. Our pharmacists review your prescriptions with you - including how to take your medication and manage any side effects. Pharmacists are available 24/7 to assist you when you have questions. Our Registered Nurse and Registered Dietitian offer personalized consultations to assist you with any medically-based questions and nutritional care. We stay in touch with you regularly to remind you when it is time to refill your prescriptions. We are always here to help.

Additional Resources:

The American Heart Association – www.heart.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov/cholesterol
National Institute of Health – www.medlineplus.gov/cholesterol
Cardio Smart – www.cardiosmart.org
American Stroke Association – www.strokeassociation.org
Heart 360 – www.heart360.org

This information is intended for educational purposes only. The material is not a substitute for professional help or medical diagnosis. It is important that you consult a medical professional if this information leads you to believe there is a concern for you or your patient(s). The diagnosis and treatment of all physical and/or psychological disorders requires a trained professional.