

High Cholesterol...My Story

Geoff, 47, was diagnosed with raised blood cholesterol levels six months ago after a routine check-up and has successfully lowered it by a combination of diet and lifestyle changes and by taking a statin.

My diagnosis

"I'd never really thought much about my diet as I'm not overweight, mainly because I have a job where I'm on my feet all day on the track.

It was my wife Sally who persuaded me to have a check-up after my father had a heart attack. When you're younger you never really think about your health much and take it for granted - but Dad's heart attack really made me think. He survived, but his health is not good now and I started to think about the quality of life I could look forward to in old age.

I've always eaten bacon butties, burgers and fries and cheese, whatever I can get my hands on as I'm always hungry at work. Not surprisingly then, when I had a cholesterol test done at my GP surgery, my cholesterol levels were quite high."

Treatment

"My GP explained that raised cholesterol was a risk factor for having a heart attack and said it was important I tried to reduce it. He said the most effective way of doing this was by taking a daily statin for the rest of my life. He explained statins could lower my cholesterol by 30 to 50 per cent depending on the dose and the brand prescribed, so I agreed to give them a go as it seemed like a no-brainer."

What I did

"The cholesterol reading was a wake-up call for my health generally so I decided to make some changes to my diet and lifestyle too, as my GP explained they could further reduce my risk of having a heart attack later in life.

- **I changed my diet:** *"The bacon butties are reserved for an occasional treat and I'm much more likely to start the day with a bowl of porridge and some fresh fruit these days - it actually gives me more energy and keeps me fuller which shocked me. The dietician my GP referred me to said that it was important for me to cut down on saturated fats and to eat more fibre. After hearing this I tried to cut down on red meat and swap it for chicken or fish. To get more fibre I snack on fruit and vegetables and try to have things like beans and lentils in some of my meals. I never thought I would eat these types of foods but you can't*



Part of the “...my story” series

knock it until you try it and I actually find my food far more interesting now.”

- **I started exercising more:** *“I hadn’t realised that doing exercise can be good for cholesterol and actually boost levels of the good cholesterol (HDL), but now I know this I’ve started walking to work instead of getting a lift from my wife and we also try to go for a walk together at weekends.*

“At first I couldn’t think how I could squeeze any more into my days – but then my doctor explained that if I couldn’t manage a 30 minute block of exercise it is just as effective to do three 10 minute sessions or two 15 minute sessions of say brisk walking or jogging which is why I’ve started walking to work.”

Where I am now

“My total cholesterol level is now within the healthy range, thanks to the combination of taking a daily statin, changing my eating habits and being more active.

The changes have meant that I’m fitter, my blood pressure is also lower and I’ve lost a couple of inches from my waist, all of which I’m told are good things for heart health.

I feel like I’m on track for a healthier old age than my dad now and it hasn’t been that hard to achieve. I’m advising all my colleagues to get their cholesterol checked – I had no idea what my cholesterol was before and had no symptoms – it really does pay to get checked out.”



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