

Why Should You Know Your Homocysteine Level?

The medical approach for trying to detect early signs of heart disease has rested mainly on cholesterol levels. HDL and LDL levels are of great interest today. People with high levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol have been educated to change their diet, increase exercise and take medication to lower their cholesterol levels. Unfortunately, we still have serious levels of heart disease and atherosclerosis in our country. Controlling cholesterol has become a questionable tactic to prevent heart disease by many medical providers.

The newer, and arguably better, test for predicting cardiovascular disease risk today is homocysteine. Homocysteine is an amino acid that is a by product of methionine metabolism and a toxic substance that is capable of directly injuring the arterial lining, which is the damage that causes atherosclerosis and subsequent cardiovascular disease. Under normal, healthy conditions in our bodies, it exists only briefly. However, when we are deficient in vitamins B6, B12, and/or folic acid, homocysteine is elevated. Even slightly elevated amounts are considered to seriously increase your chances of atherosclerosis, the leading cause of cardiovascular disease. Larger levels of homocysteine can then almost assuredly cause these problems.

Who then is more likely to have elevated homocysteine levels? People who have depleted B6, B12, and/or Folic Acid levels. Vitamin B6, Pyridoxine, is depleted with oral contraceptives, depression medications, antibiotics, anti-inflammatory meds, cardiovascular drugs, estrogen replacement meds, and people that don't eat foods that contain B6 like many vegetables. B12, Cyanocobalamine, is deficient in people taking ulcer medications, proton pump inhibitors, many cholesterol drugs, oral contraceptives, gout medication, anti-inflammatories, probably the main anti diabetic drug; metformin (glucophage), antibiotics, and people having digestive acid reflux problems that can't produce intrinsic factor that is needed to absorb B12. Folic acid is reduced with many of these same medications as well as others. No need to repeat the lists again, you get the point.

You may then be asking, "What are the signs of B6, B12 and Folic Acid Deficiencies?" B6 is needed to convert tryptophan into serotonin. A deficiency in the neurotransmitter serotonin is highly associated with depression. In the brain serotonin is converted to melatonin, a hormone that controls sleep. Insomnia is therefore greatly influenced by B6 levels. Estrogen gene expression is greatly increased with low B6 levels that may lead to PMS like symptoms like: heavy menstrual flow, tender breasts, irregular menstrual cycles, and mood swings. B6 is reduced in the body with alcohol consumption, tobacco smoke, and trans fats used in deep frying. The U.S. Department of agriculture reported that 80% of Americans are deficient in vitamin B6. B12 symptoms include: fatigue, extremity numbness, depression, bruising easily, anemia, myelin sheath deficiency, memory loss and dizziness. Folic acid: Headache, hair loss,

anemia, cervical dysplasia, nausea, insomnia and increased rates of breast and colorectal cancer. These symptoms are seen frequently in many patients without ever testing levels of homocysteine. This may be the first time you ever heard of it! I use the test to assess the effectiveness of nutritional supplementation of these three vitamins.

I have a great passion to teach people about their health or lack there of. Many women have this risk of elevated homocysteine today simply due to commonly prescribed medications and they don't know the road they're travelling on leads to an increase in sickness and disease. Not health and wellness. The future isn't bright for these women. Many are on birth control, anti depressants, anti diabetics, and acid reflux meds. A recipe for heart attacks in my opinion. Many have the signs of this impending problem, but very few medical providers are evaluating them with this in mind. I do. If levels of homocysteine are elevated, Why not simply supply the body with these vitamins to remove homocysteine and improve your health and reduce the chances of having heart trouble?

For both men and women, cardiovascular disease is still the number one cause of death in our country. The more we know how to prevent the disease, the better we can focus our efforts to support our body's health. It simply might be B6, B12, and Folic Acid supplementation to drastically reduce our chances of heart disease. It certainly won't hurt to try. Knowing your homocysteine level could be the best way to predict your risk of a heart attack, so, Call my office for an evaluation. It may be the best call you make in your life!
412.243.6676

Dr. Shannon David Smith, D.C., C.C.S.M.S.