Cholesterol - Part I

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Putting Risks for Heart Attacks and Strokes in Perspective

You may occasionally ask yourself the question, “Am I doing what is necessary to reduce my risks for disease and live a long and vital life?”

This article addresses the “heavy hitters” with a look into the risks of living in a modern society. We will share some new research and perspectives on what will hopefully, in the end, be **a lighthearted approach to taking care of yourself and reaching your longevity goals.**

This article may contain information that is new to you and that may contradict what you’ve heard in popular media. There is extensive research, as well as our own experience that backs this different non-pharmaceutical approach to preventing heart disease. We are glad to answer any of your questions.

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Cholesterol, is it so evil?

Well, no. As a matter of fact, cholesterol is an absolutely necessary substance for your good health. Without it you would become very weak and die. It is vitally important.

- 15% of the dry weight of your brain is made out of cholesterol
- The sheathes of your nerves are made out of cholesterol
- Your body uses cholesterol to make all your important sex hormones and adrenal hormones

- Without cholesterol to help with digestion you couldn't absorb any of the fat soluble vitamins like vitamin A and vitamin E
- Every single cell in your body is surrounded by a membrane containing cholesterol. Without the cholesterol membrane no cell in your body could function
- Cholesterol is essential to make serotonin, the "feel good" brain chemical

Cholesterol is so essential that your liver produces 1000 milligrams of it every day. If you follow a low cholesterol diet, your own liver will make all the more. **High cholesterol in the blood does not come from eating foods high in cholesterol.** It has to do with an imbalance in your body chemistry that prevents you from handling cholesterol properly.

A group of Dutch doctors headed by Diederick Grobee, a professor at Erasmus University Medical School, found that cholesterol is essential to make serotonin, which is often deficient in people with depression and anxiety. Most of the common antidepressant medications are serotonin uptake inhibitors. **Many of the people that are desperately in need of extra serotonin are suffering depression and anxiety because they eat low fat processed food.**

Does high cholesterol truly mean I will have a heart attack?

Contrary to popular belief, high cholesterol is not a primary risk factor for cardiovascular disease. As a matter of fact, people with low serum cholesterol (less than 180) are three times as likely to have a stroke as the average person, and 40% of all people who have heart attacks actually have low cholesterol.

Triglycerides are the bad guy

Cholesterol is not a deadly substance. It is triglycerides (the other blood fat) that are the primary risk factor increasing your chance of heart attack or stroke.

Triglycerides are related to:

- Elevated insulin levels
- Abdominal obesity
- Adult onset diabetes

According to a report in a 1997 issue of "Circulation", an internet publication of the American Heart Association, too much of this type of fat can contribute to the hardening and narrowing of your arteries thus increasing the risk of heart attack nearly 3-fold. (As a point of reference, normal triglyceride levels are below 150. Levels above 200 are high.)

Just as eating cholesterol has nothing to do with raising cholesterol levels in your blood, eating triglycerides also has absolutely nothing to do with raising triglyceride levels in

your blood. Triglycerides (and cholesterol as well) are elevated by eating starches and sugars, and the consumption of alcohol. Triglycerides are made in the liver from any excess sugars which have not been used for energy. Sugars and grains require insulin secretion which is a potent stimulus to the liver to produce triglycerides. Triglycerides in the blood are the direct result of carbohydrates from the diet being converted by insulin.

A recent Harvard study showed that a high triglyceride to low HDL cholesterol ratio is a near perfect predictor of your risk for cardiovascular disease.

Is it necessary to restrict cholesterol foods in my diet?

Numerous studies have shown that it is aberrant lipid metabolism, not over-consumption, that causes cholesterol problems. The body naturally produces 1000 mg. of cholesterol daily. It is vital for health. By comparison, a high cholesterol diet provides only about 800 mg. **When large quantities of cholesterol are ingested the body simply makes less of its own to avoid an excess.**

Margarine, mayonnaise, cooking oil, and salad dressings are often made with hydrogenated oils. These oils create catabolic damage throughout the body and cause the oxidative damage in the blood vessel walls and in the heart that precipitates a cardiovascular crisis. These harmful oils will absolutely accelerate the aging process. **Read labels carefully and avoid hydrogenated oils.** There are many fine products at health food stores that provide healthy alternatives. Olive oil and coconut oil are always good choices.

For a quick guide to oils and fats, see our article in Healthy Living: Fats and Oils 101.

The Egg/Cholesterol Myth

Eggs have been vilified as a leading culprit in dietary cholesterol. They are however an excellent nutrient-dense food that packs six grams of protein, a bit of vitamin B-12, vitamin E, riboflavin, folic acid, calcium, zinc, iron, and essential fatty acids into a mere 75 calories. **Second to the lactalbumin protein in human milk, eggs have the highest quality protein of any food.** The healthy fats that exist in the yolk of an egg, and saturated fats in general, all have health inducing properties. Given that high cholesterol in the blood does not come from eating foods high in cholesterol, there is no need to limit these desirable food substances. The task is to manage lipid metabolism, not to restrict saturated fats and cholesterol in the diet.

What foods affect cholesterol and triglyceride levels?

There are dietary considerations that are important to maintaining normal cholesterol metabolism and thus normal cholesterol levels. Sugar and unsaturated fats (vegetable oils) are two foods that derange metabolism and elevate cholesterol levels. These are the

causes of high blood fats. These are also the causes of cardiovascular disease, cancer, and any of our degenerative diseases.

By totally eliminating the consumption of alcohol and sweetened beverages (including juice), along with minimizing bread, cereal, pasta, and of course, cakes, cookies, pie, and ice cream — anyone with high triglycerides will see a significant improvement.

It is abnormal sugar metabolism that is responsible for both the elevated blood lipids and for the damage to the cardiovascular system. The Atkins Institute estimates that more than 75% of all cases of high blood pressure are associated with poor glycemic control.

What about cholesterol lowering drugs?

Since high blood cholesterol isn't a causative factor of cardiovascular disease there is virtually no benefit from these drugs in terms of protecting from heart attacks and strokes. **The danger to your health from cholesterol lowing drugs far exceeds the danger to your health from having elevated cholesterol in your blood.**

As previously noted, cholesterol is a necessary substance produced by your liver. Cholesterol-reducing drugs restrict liver function so that it cannot produce the 1000 mgs of cholesterol a day that the body requires. Liver damage from these drugs is such a major concern that once you are on them it is suggested that you have your blood tested for liver function enzymes every 6 months to make sure your liver isn't being destroyed too quickly.

Statin drugs have been shown to cause nerve damage and to impair memory. One reason that Statin drugs have these various serious side effects is that they work by inhibiting a vital enzyme that manufactures cholesterol in the liver. That is the same enzyme that is used to manufacture coenzyme Q10, which is a bio-chemical that is needed to transfer energy from food to our cells to be used for the work of staying alive and healthy. (For more information on Co Q-10 see our Featured Pharmacy Item.)

If you are on these drugs, know that you are putting your health at risk. We encourage you to come into the clinic for more sound approaches to your health.

Natural Solutions

It is just nonsense that so many doctors, hospitals, and insurance companies as well, use blood serum cholesterol levels as a marker for heart risk. It is simply not a valid indicator. **High cholesterol can accompany heart disease, but it is not the cause of it.** There are natural substances such as Coenzyme Q-10, Taurine, Vitamin E, Niasafe-600, Choleast, Omega 3 Fatty Acids, L-Carnitine, Vitamin C, and Selenium (to name a few) that will lower cholesterol and dietary changes can make a more permanent change.

High cholesterol and triglycerides, that will not lower, have been found to be linked to five different genetic defects and sometimes to lead toxicity, again not diet. There are laboratory tests that can verify these findings, and we can provide diet and detoxification procedures that are beneficial. Among the recommendations we might make for you are a diet evaluation, testing highly c-reactive protein, a Metabolic Individualized Nutritional Evaluation (M.I.N.E. test), and/or more sensitive blood tests. **Simple dietary changes may be enough. If you need more we have many other tools available to get you back to health and vitality.**