



Busting the Cholesterol Myth

Written by Jill Grunewald and published in part in tastebud magazine, Mar. 2010

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For years I have gleefully sung the praises of full fat foods, which is typically met with a pregnant pause, one raised eyebrow, a chuckle, or all three. Saturated fats and cholesterol have been vilified for 30 years, but the truth is, they're essential for good health and a necessary component of every cell in your body.

We crave fat and cholesterol because we can't live without these vital components of a healthy diet. They regulate insulin levels, help convert food into energy, protect liver function, and help monitor the body's innate cholesterol production, which is generated by the liver and makes up about 75% (depending on heredity) of the cholesterol our bodies need. The rest we eat in the form of full fat dairy, meat, eggs, and shellfish.

According to Marcelle Pick, Nurse, Medical Advisor, lecturer, and founder of the *Women to Women* clinic in Maine, "Cholesterol is the mother of all fat molecules in our bodies. We literally run on the stuff. It maintains neurotransmitter and brain function, builds brain and nerve tissue, and nourishes the immune system. It provides the insulation around nerves that transmit electrical impulses. It is a keystone of normal cell function and mood regulation and helps us digest fat-soluble vitamins like A, D, E, and K. Importantly for women, many of our most important hormones, including estrogen and progesterone, are made from cholesterol."

If you shun cholesterol, you may be eating too many carbohydrates and sugars, forcing your liver to overproduce cholesterol to take up the slack. Until you enjoy some moderate amounts of cholesterol-rich foods, this valve doesn't shut off. Consequently, a carbohydrate-rich diet can actually lead to high cholesterol.

The Rage Goes On

Cholesterol is not the major culprit in heart disease. And saturated fat does not raise cholesterol levels. I know, it's shocking. These theories have been proven for decades, but mainstream medicine continues to heavily promote low fat diets and the multi-billion dollar statin drug industry. Statins can come with a host of serious side effects and they block the enzyme the liver needs to produce cholesterol naturally, leaving you deficient in enzymes, CoQ10, and vitamin D. What's almost worse is that they incite a sense of false security. Millions of Americans are taking statins, but the number of people suffering from heart attacks and heart disease is undoubtedly on the rise.

Jill Grunewald

Certified Holistic Nutrition Counselor

www.healthfulelements.com

jill@healthfulelements.com

612.840.2034

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Dr. Joseph Mercola states, “If you decide to take cholesterol-lowering drugs...you are not only stopping your body’s natural healing process, you are exposing yourself to drugs that are loaded with side effects, not the least of which is depleting your body of Coenzyme Q10, which leads to fatigue, muscle weakness, and ultimately heart failure.”

According to Dr. George Mann, co-director of the Framingham Heart Study, “The diet-heart idea [the notion that saturated fats and cholesterol cause heart disease] is the greatest scientific deception of our times. This idea has been repeatedly shown to be wrong, and yet, for complicated reasons of pride, profit, and prejudice, the hypothesis continues to be exploited...”

So, What’s the Problem?

As with all degenerative conditions, the problem lies in chronic inflammation due to poor dietary habits, stress, inadequate exercise, and exposure to toxins. Cholesterol is produced when cells become damaged and indeed, inspection of the arteries of someone at risk for a heart attack shows cholesterol and plaque buildup. Cholesterol will only remain in the artery if damage is present. So you see, it’s the response to chronic inflammation that has given cholesterol its bad name.

According to Dr. Mary Enig, Ph.D., nutritionist, and biochemist internationally renowned for her research on the nutritional aspects of fats and oils, “Cholesterol acts as a precursor to vital corticosteroids, hormones that help us deal with stress and protect the body against heart disease and cancer; and to the sex hormones like androgen, testosterone, estrogen, and progesterone. Cholesterol is a precursor to vitamin D, a very important fat-soluble vitamin needed for healthy bones and nervous system, proper growth, mineral metabolism, muscle tone, insulin production, reproduction and immune system function.”

Lastly, Dr. Mercola states, “Whatever you do, don’t fall for the mistaken belief that the lower your cholesterol goes, the better. If you lower your cholesterol through artificial means (statin drugs) without addressing the underlying causes, your body will continue to degenerate.”

Full Fat Cheese Please

As you can see, full fat is where it’s at (organic/sustainably-produced, because you don’t want all of the hormones and antibiotics, which cause inflammation). This really scrambles a lot of people’s brains, but I can assure you that it does help maintain healthy weight. You want to eat foods in their natural state as much as possible and foods that have had the fat removed have been processed. You’re better off eating moderate amounts of full fat animal products than eating a larger volume of low fat foods. You’ll feel more satiated and your taste buds will thank you!

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What You Can Do Now

- Eat real, natural forms of full fat and cholesterol every day (avoid proteins with growth hormones, antibiotics, and environmental toxins, which accumulate in animals' fat cells)
- Strictly avoid hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils and trans fats
- Store all oils in the refrigerator to avoid rancidity
- Get your vitamin D – preferably via sunlight; even a 20 min. walk in the winter does a body good, but supplementation in the cold months is important
- Get your B vitamins – B6, B12, and folic acid, which reduce an amino acid that damages arterial cells
- Take essential fatty acids daily – fish oil, evening primrose oil, flax seeds, etc.
- Strictly avoid high fructose corn syrup
- Get exercise that's right for your body type
- Reduce stress
- Get your thyroid checked – thyroid converts cholesterol into hormones

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