

WESTGATE ORTHOPAEDIC PHYSICAL THERAPY & EXERCISE INC., P.S.



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Cholesterol Confusion: How much does the cholesterol in your food really matter?

For the full article, please see the University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter Sept 2011 issue

TRUE or FALSE?

1. Most people's blood cholesterol levels rise significantly when they eat a lot of cholesterol
2. Some foods contain "good" cholesterol
3. Beef contains more cholesterol than chicken

Answers: All answers are false.

1. While dietary cholesterol raises blood cholesterol levels at least a little in most people, this effect depends on genetics, insulin levels, body weight and other dietary and metabolic factors. It's estimated that only about 15-20% of people have a significant response to cholesterol in food. There is no test to identify such "hyper-responders."

2. Have you ever looked for "good" cholesterol on a food label? Don't. All the cholesterol you eat is the same, and is chemically identical to that made by the liver. What's called "good" cholesterol is HDL (high-density lipoprotein), which is assembled in the liver and circulates in the blood.

3. Fat and cholesterol are independent substances. Fat cells contain no more cholesterol than other cells do. Thus fatty meat has about as much cholesterol as lean meat does. All meats—beef, pork and poultry, whether lean or fatty—average about 25mg of cholesterol per ounce.

Many people think that all the cholesterol in their blood (and elsewhere in the body) comes from the cholesterol they eat, which is called dietary cholesterol. In fact, most of it is made by our livers. The body makes more than enough cholesterol to meet its needs. Excess cholesterol you consume is excreted by the liver, but some is deposited in the walls of your arteries, contributing to atherosclerosis and possibly heart attack and stroke.

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends that healthy people limit cholesterol consumption to 300mg a day. For those with heart disease, diabetes, undesirable cholesterol levels or other coronary risk factors, the limit is 200 mg.

Bottom line: Most people don't need to worry much about dietary cholesterol, since it will have a small effect on blood cholesterol, at most. It's far more important to keep saturated and trans fats low and to replace them with foods rich in unsaturated fats and/or fiber, which are beneficial for blood cholesterol. But if you are obese or have diabetes, for instance, you should stick to the AHA guidelines.

People with high HDL (“good”) cholesterol are more likely to live to age 85 and are less likely to develop colon cancer, according to two recent studies. In one, in the *American Journal of Cardiology*, men at age 65 with high HDL (defined as over 50mg/dl) had a 28 percent better chance of living to age 85 than those with low HDL (less than 40mg/dl). And a large, long-term study in 10 European countries, in the journal *Gut*, found that people with the highest HDL levels had a 46 percent lower risk of colon cancer than those with the lowest HDL. Still, these were observational studies, and it’s not known how much raising HDL, by itself, will keep people healthy.

University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, June 2011

Green tea lowers blood cholesterol a little, suggests a Chinese study recently in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, which included research from 14 clinical trials. The studies used either green tea or its extract (capsules) for anywhere from three weeks to three months. On average, total cholesterol dropped by 7 points, and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol by 2 points. That’s not enough to get excited about, but numerous population studies have linked tea (green or black) with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.

University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, November

Eggs have a bad reputation because of their cholesterol (the yolk of a large egg has 185mg), but they can still be part of your diet. According to the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, “evidence suggests that one egg per day does not result in increased blood cholesterol levels, nor does it increase the risk of cardiovascular disease in healthy people.” Indeed, several well-designed studies (some sponsored by the egg industry) have found no link between dietary cholesterol and heart disease—except in people with diabetes.

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