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Contributors

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

CHOLESTEROL



THE FACTS

INTRODUCTION BY DR MIKE SMITH

(Radio Doctor, Consultant to Woman's Own and Director of Public Health)



The biggest cause of death in this country is coronary heart disease — the clogging up of the arteries which leads to a heart attack. Heart disease is responsible for killing nearly 500 people every day in the UK alone.

Research shows that a high blood cholesterol level is a major contributor to coronary heart disease and that the food we eat is an important influence on our blood cholesterol level.

So what can we do to control the amount of cholesterol in the blood and reduce the risk of coronary heart disease?

This leaflet sets out to dispel some myths about cholesterol and provide you with THE FACTS.



What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance which plays an essential role in constructing the cells and hormones inside the body. It is naturally present in the blood — it is made from fat by the liver. The liver must produce a certain amount of cholesterol — without it the body would cease to work.



What is the difference between blood cholesterol and dietary cholesterol?

Blood cholesterol is the level of cholesterol in your blood stream — high intakes of fat encourage the liver to produce cholesterol. Dietary cholesterol is the amount of cholesterol you eat in your diet.



What happens if I have a high level of blood cholesterol?

If too much cholesterol is present in the blood, it will work its way into the artery walls, making them narrower.

Narrow arteries will slow down the flow of blood to the heart or possibly stop the flow completely — this will result in a heart attack.



Is dietary cholesterol the main cause of high blood cholesterol?

No. Research shows that the amount of fat — particularly saturated fat — eaten in the diet has a greater effect in raising your blood cholesterol than the amount of dietary cholesterol. Therefore, medical experts recommend that you cut down on saturated fat to reduce your risk of developing heart disease. Foods high in saturated fat include cream, butter, pastry, cakes, biscuits, fatty meat and high fat cheese.





Why were we told in the past to cut down on eggs?

In the past it was thought that people should limit the number of eggs they eat because of the cholesterol content of eggs. But it is now known that saturated fat — which eggs are low in — is more influential in raising blood cholesterol than dietary cholesterol itself.



How can I lower my blood cholesterol level and the risk of a heart attack?

To control your blood cholesterol level and reduce your risk of coronary heart disease you must maintain a healthy lifestyle. This includes reducing your intake of fat — particularly saturated fat; increasing your level of exercise; maintaining the ideal weight for your height; and not smoking. By cutting down on salt, sugar and alcohol, and eating more fibre-rich starchy foods you will have a healthier diet overall.



How important is polyunsaturated fat?

Polyunsaturated fat — sometimes known as essential fat — contains basic building blocks which help the body grow and develop. We need these building blocks in small amounts so when fat is used it should be of this type. But it is important to remember that we still need to cut down the overall amount of fat eaten in the diet. Foods high in polyunsaturated fat include fish; lean meat; soya, corn and sunflower oils and spreads made from these oils.



Why is fibre important in my diet?

Medical experts believe that fibre is important in the diet because it can help to lower blood cholesterol levels. The diet should include a mixture of foods rich in fibre including cereals, fresh fruit and vegetables, pulses, and wholemeal bread.



Can high blood cholesterol be hereditary?

Yes. For most people, the level of blood cholesterol is the result of both diet and lifestyle. However, occasionally, high blood cholesterol is the result of a defect which is inherited — this can lead to coronary heart disease. If you have a strong family history of heart disease, get your blood cholesterol level checked out by your doctor.



HEALTHY EATING



A "healthy diet" is one which is low in fat — particularly saturated fat — and high in starch and fibre such as breakfast cereals, potatoes and pasta. On average fat currently provides just over 40% of the energy required by the body. So a reduction of saturated fat in the diet will result in a gap in the body's energy supply — this should be replaced by an increase in starchy foods.

An increase in starchy foods in the diet will automatically result in an increase in fibre. Fibre is not absorbed by the body and helps prevent constipation. Most importantly, certain types of fibre such as that found in fruit, vegetables and pulses can lower blood cholesterol.

Protein plays a vital role in a healthy, balanced diet. It is used in the body to repair old cells and manufacture new cells. Protein can be found in many foods, including meat, pulses, fish, dairy products, eggs and cereals. Eggs are one of the cheapest sources of protein available and also provide us with most vitamins, except Vitamin C.

An unhealthy lifestyle — including poor diet, being overweight, lack of exercise, stress and smoking — can also lead to high blood pressure which is another major contributor to heart disease. The food we consume has a vital effect on blood pressure. A reduction in the amount of salt in the diet can help to reduce high blood pressure and the risk to the heart. Blood pressure may be further reduced by an increase in calcium, potassium and magnesium in the diet.

If you are overweight, cutting back on sugar is one of the easiest ways to cut the calories in the diet without losing any other nutrients.

FOODS TO EAT FREQUENTLY (HIGH FIBRE/LOW FAT)	FOODS TO EAT REGULARLY	FOODS TO EAT LESS OF
• Vegetables, including potatoes (baked or boiled) • Fresh fruit and salads • Pulses (eg baked beans, kidney beans and lentils) • Breakfast cereals, especially wholewheat or bran • Pasta and rice, especially brown varieties • Bread, especially wholemeal	• Fish; mackerel and herring are particularly high in polyunsaturated fat • Lean meat • Milk (semi-skimmed or skimmed) • Low fat yoghurt • Poultry • Eggs • Low fat cheeses eg cottage cheese	• Cream • Hidden fat and sugar in cakes, biscuits, chocolate, puddings, pastry, ice-cream, soft drinks and alcohol • Butter • Oil and margarine — choose one labelled "high in polyunsaturates" eg soya, corn and sunflower • Sugar • Salt

COOKING TIPS

DO • Poach • Grill or bake
• Steam • Boil • Microwave
• Add less salt when cooking • Try yoghurt instead of cream • Remove visible fat from meat • Use semi-skimmed or skimmed milk (not full fat)

DON'T • Fry (shallow or deep) • Sauté
• Add butter to vegetables • Overcook vegetables (it removes the goodness)
• Peel potatoes (skin contains nutrients and fibre)

CHOLESTEROL – WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

CORONARY PREVENTION GROUP

“... raised blood cholesterol is caused by eating too much saturated fat. Saturated fat encourages the body to make more cholesterol than it needs or can get rid of, leading to the narrowing of the arteries and, eventually, coronary heart disease.”

FAMILY HEART ASSOCIATION



“It is now well understood that a diet high in fat, particularly saturated (hard/animal) fat is detrimental to health. Too much saturated fat can cause a raised blood cholesterol which in turn can be a major factor in narrowing or even blocking arteries.”

BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION

“... research has shown that eating foods which contain a lot of fat, especially saturated fat, has a much greater effect in pushing up the blood cholesterol level than the dietary cholesterol.”



Health
Education
Authority

“Cholesterol found in the body is often called ‘blood cholesterol’. Cholesterol is also found in some foods (dietary cholesterol), but this cholesterol does not have a major effect on the overall amount of cholesterol in the blood of most people.

“The amount of saturates eaten is the main influence on blood cholesterol levels.”

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

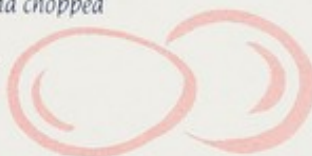
“Many people in the UK have high levels of blood cholesterol, increasing the risk of a heart attack; the main cause is a diet high in saturated fat.”

HEALTHY RECIPES

SPICY SCRAMBLE

Serves 1

15ml/2 tsp olive/sunflower oil
1/2 small onion, finely chopped
1/2 green chilli, finely chopped
large pinch curry powder
1 tomato, skinned, seeded and chopped
2 eggs, beaten
freshly ground black pepper
1 slice of wholemeal toast
salad garnish



Heat the oil in a small pan, add the onion and chilli and cook over a low heat until soft. Stir in the curry powder and cook for a few seconds. Add the eggs and tomato and cook over a medium heat, stirring until the eggs are scrambled.

Spoon onto the toast and serve, garnish with salad.

POTATO BAKE

Serves 4

900g/2lb potatoes, sliced with skins on
1 large onion, peeled and finely sliced
freshly ground black pepper
a little sunflower margarine, for greasing dish
a little grated nutmeg, to taste
3 eggs
300ml/1/2 pint skimmed milk
75g/3oz low fat Cheddar cheese
garnish with fresh thyme (optional)
6oz broccoli florets
salad/fresh vegetables for serving



Par-boil the potatoes for about 5 minutes. Drain well. Place into a greased 1.5 litre/2 pint ovenproof dish with sliced onion.

Plunge broccoli into pan of boiling water and cook for 2 minutes. Drain and add to the potatoes in ovenproof dish.

Sprinkle the seasoning and nutmeg onto the layers of potatoes, broccoli and onion.

In a bowl beat the eggs and 45ml/3 tblsp milk. Put the remaining milk in a pan and bring slowly to the boil. Pour the milk onto the eggs and strain the mixture.

Pour the egg custard mix over the potatoes, sprinkle them with the grated cheese, cover and cook in the oven at 180°C/350°F/Gas Mark 4 for about 45 minutes until the potatoes are tender.

Uncover the dish and brown under a hot grill. Serve with salad or vegetables of your choice.

BROCCOLI AND EGG GRATIN

Serves 1

125g/4oz broccoli florets
2 eggs
1 tsp sunflower margarine
15g/1/2oz plain flour
150ml/5 fl oz skimmed milk, warmed
pinch cayenne pepper
2 tblsp fresh wholemeal breadcrumbs
40g/1 1/2oz reduced fat Cheddar cheese, grated
salad garnish



Put the eggs into a pan and boil for 7 minutes until just hard-boiled. Meanwhile plunge the broccoli into a pan of boiling water and cook for just 2 minutes, drain and transfer to an ovenproof dish.

Melt the margarine in a pan, stir in the flour then gradually add the milk. Return to the heat and stir until smooth and thickened, season with cayenne. Shell the eggs and quarter, arrange amongst the broccoli and pour over the sauce. Scatter the breadcrumbs and cheese over the top then bake in the oven, 190°C/375°F/Gas Mark 5 for 15 minutes until the top is crisp. Serve with salad.



British Egg Information Service, 126-128 Cromwell Road, London SW7 4ET. Tel: 071-370 7411.