



## **Monthly Newsletter- February 2011**

### **High Cholesterol & Heart Disease; Myth or Truth?**

A new study published just a month ago, showed that women who ate at least one serving per day leafy green vegetables, had a 44% reduced risk of heart disease, compared to those who ate two or fewer serving per week.

Also, women who ate at least one ounce of olive oil per day were also about 40% less likely to suffer from heart problems than women who consumed the half an ounce or less per day. (The Study followed almost 30,000 Italian women for an average of eight years, and was conducted at the Cancer Research and Prevention Institute in Florence.)

What's behind the heart benefits of dark green leafy vegetables and olive oil here?

For nearly four decades we have been bombarded by the anti-cholesterol crusade. We have been lectured the evils of eggs and butter and instead we were told to drink skim milk and switch to vegetable oils and margarine.

Cholesterol has been vilified as the major cause of heart disease and being on statins has become the rule more than the exception. Even young children are now being diagnosed with high cholesterol, so a new emerging market for statins is arising in our near future. How is that possible?

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the cholesterol= heart disease theory (the lipid hypothesis) emerged from studies where rabbits were fed a high cholesterol diet, rich in meats, eggs and milk, which produced atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries. The theory really gained momentum with the research of Dr. Ancel Keys in the



late 1950s who showed the direct correlation between calories ingested from fat and the rate of death due to heart disease.

Dr. Ancel's theory has since been disputed over the years and the truth is that there is very little evidence to support that a diet low in cholesterol actually reduces death from heart disease. A couple of studies have shown no exact link that exists between food and blood cholesterol and yet other studies have shown that lowering cholesterol with drugs or low fat diet, does not lower the risk of developing heart disease.

During this period of 1910-1970 the proportion of traditional animal fat in the American diet declined from 83% to 62% and butter consumption from 18 pounds per person to 4. At the same time the consumption of vegetable oils in the form of shortening and margarine increased about 400% while the consumption of sugar and processed foods has increased about 60%.

Despite these dietary changes and the overwhelming usage of statin drugs, heart disease still remains the #1 killer in the United States. While before 1920, heart disease was very rare in America, today heart disease causes at least 40% of the US deaths!

Could it be, that like so many other drugs, statins treat the symptom and not the underlying cause?

There has definitely been a mass confusion about cholesterol and now we find that cholesterol seemingly has little to nothing to do with cardiovascular disease. In fact, almost half of the people who suffer from a heart attack have low cholesterol levels..

We thought we needed a cholesterol inhibitor but what we really need is a diet that is designed to inhibit inflammation!

Cholesterol is one of the most important biochemicals in our bodies. Our brains and cells are absolutely dependent upon abundant supplies of cholesterol.



Cholesterol coats our nerves, is essential for proper function of serotonin receptors, and it is the precursor to Vitamin D and all the adrenal and sex hormones in the body. It also is the “glue” that gives our cells membranes the strength they need. Last but not least, it has been shown to be an antioxidant that actually protects us against free radical damage that leads to heart disease and that is how it actually repairs any damage on the arterial walls.

If cholesterol levels are elevated, you want to ask what might be the cause of the elevated cholesterol level. An elevated cholesterol level is not the primary problem; it is a warning sign; a symptom.

Atherosclerosis, is an inflammatory process and thus cholesterol can act as an anti-inflammatory substance in the body. An easy analogy that I can make is imagining that inflammation is a fire and cholesterol is the firemen and the fire trucks that are trying to put off the fire. Taking a cholesterol-lowering drug, is like getting rid of the firemen and the fire trucks that are trying to help, instead of letting them do their job and as soon as the emergency situation is under control, try to find out what started the fire in the first place.

You see, cholesterol is just a symptom of what is going on in the body whereas inflammation is the source of so much disease and certainly heart.

So what causes Inflammation? Increased consumption of hydrogenated fats and vegetable oils, excess consumption of refined carbohydrates in the form of sugar and white flour, mineral deficiencies, particularly low magnesium, iodine and vitamin C which protects us from free radicals. In addition, any form of stress that we impose upon our bodies either in the form of emotional stress or in the form of chemicals, toxins, preservatives, additives and oxidized fats that are found in processed foods, is also a cause of inflammation.

So the higher consumption of both olive oil and dark green leafy vegetables support the anti-inflammatory effect. It's likely the high levels of folate, potassium, Vitamin C (antioxidant and supports your immune system), beta carotene, magnesium and the polyphenols in



olive oil (also powerful antioxidants) are probably responsible for the heart-healthy effects.

While more research is being done to figure out exactly how greens, olive oil, and the heart are interconnected, it's probably a safe bet to have some spinach, kale, or collards with a drizzle of olive oil for dinner tonight.

Make the switch from iceberg lettuce to the dark green leafy vegetables that are so potent in nutrients and please don't be scared by using some healthy fats in your diet in the form of olive oil, avocados, chia, hemp and sunflower seeds as well as some saturated fat like butter or even better coconut oil. (more on the benefits of coconut oil in a future newsletter).

We talk about all these principles in our [Group Nutrition Program](#) and if you are not familiar with some of the greens, take the time to become familiar with them and incorporate them in your meals.

To your health,  
Dina

**PS.** There are hundreds of recipes in which you can incorporate Kale and other green leafy vegetables. If you want some ideas and inspiration please join our [February Healthy cooking class](#) that will be full of heart healthy meals.

**P.P.S.** To view at a list of top 10 foods that support your heart, refer to our [February newsletter from last year](#). You will also see how many of those generally accepted "heart" foods for the most part have anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties too!!!