

# Understanding Cholesterol

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Did you know that your body produces more cholesterol each day than you consume in your diet and that eating fatty foods does not increase your cholesterol levels very much? In fact, your body will produce less cholesterol if it has to. It is said that high cholesterol levels increase the risk of heart disease. Eskimos eat mainly meat and blubber and have low cholesterol levels and very low rates of heart disease. The Masai cattle-herders of Africa drink milk all day long and have very low cholesterol levels. Developing children demand cholesterol for proper growth.

What does cholesterol do for us? It is a molecule which forms the basis of all of the steroid hormones crucial to life: estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, aldosterone, cortisol and DHEA. It also forms the membranes of all our bodies' cells. We can't grow or repair any tissue if we don't have cholesterol. It even helps with learning and memory and is the basis for vitamin D which makes strong bones and teeth as well as boosting immunity to disease. Fats represent a large fraction of our brain matter – the white matter- and line most of our nerves and are responsible for the speed of our thinking and reflexes. Obviously, cholesterol is good and necessary to life.

Studies don't show a relationship between heart disease and cholesterol levels and some studies even show an inverse relationship to be true. The statin drugs used to lower cholesterol levels can actually increase the risk of heart attacks themselves. These are the best selling drugs in the country. Much attention is now being given to the idea that inflammation is the real cause of cardiovascular disease. During stress or actual injury the body releases inflammatory molecules which can change the inside layer of the arteries. It is said that the plaque buildup in the vessels is actually the body's attempt to heal the vascular injury. Autopsied Viet Nam vets showed great levels of cardiovascular disease though they were very young. Could this have been caused by stress?

Evolutionarily, we reached a point about 4 million years ago where our distant ancestors began to eat more meat and fat. This was a turning point and, according to anthropologists, significantly accelerated the ascent of man. By eating meat and fat, with their much greater nutritional and caloric density, our ancestors required less volume of food to sustain them and much less time to consume and digest it. This allowed more time for creative endeavors and technology grew rapidly with the brain. Then came control of fire and then language and then civilization and the rest is history.

It is very important to understand our diets and how our bodies work. It is unwise to eat fast food, processed food or junk food. Our bodies can't recognize the man-made molecules in them to process them and they are nutritionally bankrupt. Deep down, we all really know what is good for us. We must assume the responsibility to do what's right for ourselves and our families.

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