



HEALTH TOPIC OF THE WEEK

10/9 - Cholesterol Controversy

Introduction

Most of us have heard of HDL [the good cholesterol] and LDL [the bad cholesterol]. No doubt you have also heard that elevated LDL levels are linked to cardiovascular disease such as heart attack and stroke. But what is cholesterol, where does it come from, and is it bad for you?

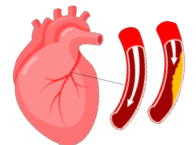
Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that's found in all the cells in your body. Your body needs some cholesterol to make hormones, vitamin D, and substances that help you digest foods. Cholesterol comes from two sources. Your liver makes cholesterol, and the remainder of the cholesterol comes from eating food from animals.

Cholesterol Controversy

The cholesterol controversy is a recent phenomenon. Diabetes has been described since antiquity, and blood pressure measurements first occurred in the 18th century. However, our understanding of cholesterol only dates to the beginning of the 20th century, and it is still developing.

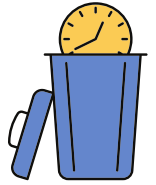
The lipid hypothesis, the concept that cholesterol plays a role in atherosclerosis and cardiovascular disease, has been the subject of controversy which started in the 1950s, peaked in the 70s and 80s and then subsided in the 90s. It seemed to be resolved by the positive outcome of the Scandinavian Simvastatin Survival Study involving Zocor, a cholesterol-lowering drug made by Merck. However, new research has emerged which questions the correlation between elevated cholesterol and heart disease.

A nondrug alternative to lowering LDL levels is desirable.



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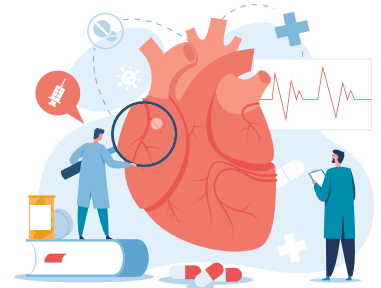
Research published in the BMJ (British Medical Journal) found that high cholesterol does not shorten life span and that statins (cholesterol lowering medications) are essentially a “waste of time,” according to one of the researchers. Previous studies have linked statins to an increased risk of diabetes and myalgia reactions.



The study reviewed research of almost 70,000 people and found that elevated levels of “bad cholesterol” did not raise the risk of early death from cardiovascular disease in people over 60. The authors called for statin guidelines to be reviewed, claiming the benefits of statins are “exaggerated.”

Not only did the study find no link between high cholesterol and early death, but it also found that people with high “bad” cholesterol (low-density lipoprotein, or LDL) actually lived longer and had fewer incidences of heart disease.

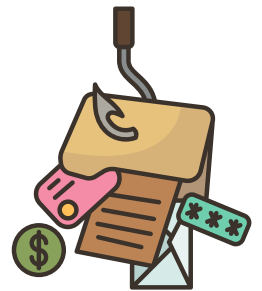
The co-author, who is a vascular surgeon, went on to say that cholesterol is vital for preventing cancer, muscle pain, infection, and other health disorders in older people. The authors concluded that lifestyle changes are more effective for improving cardiovascular health than prescription statins!



Medical Outrage

Naturally, this paper drew tremendous fire. Its conclusions were immediately attacked by many experts in the field. The results of the published article were quickly dismissed as misinformation. The controversy over the relationship between cholesterol and heart disease continues.

The medical field has potential bias because statins are among the most prescribed drugs - one in four Americans over the age of 40 takes them. The drug accounts for more than \$20 billion in spending each year. In fact, statin use has gone up more than 80 percent in the last 20 years.



On the other hand, many natural and homeopathic companies have their own questionable motives. They promote certain “natural” remedies that are guaranteed to lower cholesterol when there is scant scientific support for their claims.

A Balanced Perspective

As the cholesterol debate rages on, EPT believes there are a few things that we can agree on:

1. Cholesterol is a necessary and important substance in our body.
2. We don't know what constitutes optimal cholesterol levels.
3. Having significant elevations of LDL cholesterol could be problematic.
4. A nondrug alternative to lowering LDL levels is desirable.



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Good News

Placebo-controlled human trials have found that a fruit extract can reduce levels of artery damaging lipids, thus providing a nondrug approach to support cardiovascular health.

Clinical Results: A Nondrug Approach

Indian Gooseberry, or amla, is a fruit tree that grows in Asia. Animal studies found that amla fruit reduces LDL and triglycerides. To test these findings, researchers developed an amla fruit extract standardized to a 60% content of tannins [an antioxidant]. This tannin concentrate delivers an amla extract dose that has long-lasting antioxidant effects.

In a 12-week clinical trial, Amla doses were shown to be more effective than placebo at improving measured outcomes and in higher doses showed substantially greater reduction in cardiovascular risk factors. In the group taking 500 mg of amla extract twice daily:

- LDL cholesterol decreased 21.8%
- Protective HDL increased 22.2%
- Triglycerides decreased 19.2%
- Total cholesterol decreased 11.1%
- Inflammatory markers CRP decreased 53.8%
- Levels of the body's antioxidant, glutathione increased 53.2%

Each of the above effects have been shown in other studies to reduce cardiovascular risks. There were no serious adverse effects.

Interested in amla? Want to lower your cholesterol? Talk to EPT about heart-healthy lifestyle changes. We offer expert guidance on diet and exercise for clients of all ages and stages.

Amla is effective in lowering elevated lipid profiles.



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Additional Resources

[Doubt cast on wisdom of targeting 'bad' cholesterol to curb heart disease risk - BMJ](#)

[Controversial New Study Reports Statins Useless - Carolina Total Wellness](#)

Managing dyslipidemia for the primary prevention of cardiovascular disease *BMJ* 2018; 360 doi:

<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.k946>

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