Why Do You Really Get High Cholesterol?

The media and medical profession has frightened the public so much that many people firmly believe that fat and cholesterol should be avoided at all costs. I speak to so many people who are scared of eggs, red meat, butter and even nuts and oils, because they are fearful of either gaining body fat or increasing their chances of developing heart disease from the fat and cholesterol in these foods. This fear, however, is not grounded in scientific fact.

Cholesterol and fat are essential to life. If you do not eat cholesterol and fat, you will accelerate the aging process and will be much more likely to have raised cholesterol levels, gain weight and develop heart disease.

The Role of Cholesterol

Cholesterol and fat are used by the body as building materials for many structures and molecules in the body and if you do not eat these as part of your diet, you run the risk of developing many health problems.

Brain function, nerves, cell membranes, neurotransmitters, the immune system and many hormones involve cholesterol in some way. If you deprive your body of cholesterol the cell membranes cannot be healthy, the cells can't work properly, the nervous system can't work properly and the hormone and immune systems will become imbalanced.

Symptoms of fat and cholesterol deficiency include *carbohydrates, cravings for sweets, starches and caffeine, constipation, dry & thinning hair, infertility, insomnia, mood swings, depression, anxiety, loss of lean muscle mass and weight gain around the middle, scaly & itchy skin.*

Cholesterol in the Diet

Cholesterol can be obtained from foods such as eggs, meat, shellfish, butter and cheese. It's vitally important to eat these foods as well as other types of fat each day.

High Cholesterol is Caused by SUGAR & STRESS

If, having read this section, you are still sceptical, please refer to the bibliography list at the foot of this article.

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Your brain requires a constant supply of sugar at all times. This supply of sugar is controlled by the liver. When you eat, the liver prevents excess sugar from reaching the brain; when you are not eating, the liver releases a steady supply of sugar to the brain.

All carbohydrate, whether it is vegetable, fruit, bread, pasta, rice, biscuits, confectionary or sugar itself, is absorbed as glucose into the body. When you eat a balanced meal (protein, fat and carbohydrate together), the mixing of the different foods in the stomach and intestine slows down the absorption of sugar into the body.

Because of this slow, timed release, the body's response to the controlled absorption of glucose is also controlled. However, if you eat a meal that is loaded with carbohydrates, or a snack that is only carbohydrates (see examples below), it results in excess carbohydrates/sugar being absorbed into the body too quickly.

If the level of sugar entering the body is too high, the liver must filter out some of the sugar as a safety precaution. It does this by converting some of the sugar into other forms of energy in order to tightly regulate the amount of sugar circulating in the bloodstream.

The liver can convert sugar into glycogen, which is a molecule that is found in the muscles and liver (like a sugar 'car-park'). However if the sugar car-parks of the muscles and liver are full, the liver has to convert the sugar into other molecules:

1. **Cholesterol**
2. **Triglycerides**

Cholesterol is used as a building material for hormones, cell membranes and other important structures.

Triglycerides are fatty acids that are used for energy or fat storage.

It is normal and healthy for the liver to change some sugar into cholesterol and triglycerides. However, if you eat too many carbohydrates (i.e. too much fruit, bread, pasta, rice, confectionary, coca-cola, alcohol, etc…) or deprive your body of cholesterol, your cholesterol levels will start to rise.

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Low Fat Diets & Cholesterol Deprivation

If you do not eat enough cholesterol to meet your body's needs, your body thinks it is in crisis, or famine. During this famine the insulin that is triggered by all the carbohydrate you are eating activates a special enzyme (HMG Co-A Reductase**)** that begins to overproduce cholesterol from the carbohydrates you eat. So, you're basically eating less cholesterol, but your body is overproducing cholesterol because you are eating too much carbohydrate.

The only way to switch off the HMG Co-A Reductase enzyme is to eat cholesterol. This signals to the body that the period of crisis or famine is over. In other words, when you eat cholesterol your body stops making it.

Just because your body can make cholesterol from sugar, it doesn't mean you should stop eating the cholesterol. Your body *overproduces* cholesterol if you don't eat it because dietary cholesterol is the only thing that can stop your liver producing it.

If you don't believe me, do some research on the group of medical drugs called *statins*. Statin drugs have been designed to block HMG Co-A Reductase. It's easy to do that yourself: you just eat a balanced diet by cutting down on carbohydrates and ensuring that you eat foods such as meat, eggs, shellfish and butter each day.

Stress, Insulin & Cholesterol

Insulin is the major hormone that directs the overproduction of cholesterol in the body. Regardless of the cause of increased insulin, the body responds by making more cholesterol.

Some causes of high insulin levels are:

- Stress
- Dieting
- Caffeine
- Alcohol
- Artificial sweeteners
- Tobacco
- Steroid medications
- Recreational drugs
- Unnecessary thyroid therapy
- All medical drugs
- Eating too many carbohydrates
- Lack of exercise
- Lack of sleep
- Overwork / late nights

Stress is obviously caused by job, financial, relationship, family worries/issues and to be honest, all the other things listed above also result in stress on the

body. When the body is under stress from whatever source, it responds in a predictable way. The adrenal glands (sitting like hats on top of the kidneys) release cortisol. The cortisol helps the body to deal with the stress.

If the stressors are cumulative or persistent (look at the list above), there will be an overproduction of cortisol. Overproduction of cortisol leads to overproduction of insulin. Overproduction of insulin leads to raised cholesterol.

It is interesting that the hormone cortisol is actually made from cholesterol. So if you are stressed out and in need of more cortisol, the body's clever mechanisms elevate your cholesterol levels to cope with the demand for stress hormones! Elsewhere on my website I have written extensively on the effects of stress on the body.

Eating to Reduce Insulin, Cortisol & Cholesterol

As well as trying to minimise the stressors listed above, try to follow these eating guidelines.

1. Minimise processed carbohydrates: breads, pastries, pasta, white rice, sugar. Obtain your carbohydrates from vegetables and small portions of fruit. Be careful with root vegetables such as potatoes as they contain a lot of carbohydrate.

2. Try to avoid stimulants such as caffeine. If you are relying on these for energy, you should definitely think about getting your adrenal glands tested for adrenal fatigue/exhaustion. Contact me for details.

3. Try to eat smaller meals, more regularly. This prevents your blood sugar getting too low.

4. When you eat a meal or snack, make sure you eat some protein and fat. In other words, do not eat carbohydrates on their own (including fruit, which is rich in natural sugar).

5. Eat cholesterol-containing foods each day – butter, meats, shellfish and eggs.

6. Eat good quality fats and oils with each meal – olive oil, coconut & coconut oil, seeds, nuts (avoid all other oils as they are likely to be rancid).

7. If you can minimise alcohol, it will really help. Alcohol will stimulate the release of both cortisol and insulin. It is the simplest for of sugar and can be very damaging to your metabolism long term.

8. If you really want to fine tune your diet, determining your metabolic type is a great starting point.

You can read about cholesterol in more detail by reading books by Dr Dianna Schwarzbein, including *The Schwarzbein Principle*. Much of the information I have drawn upon here comes from Dr. Schwarzbein's extensive work in this area.

If you are struggling to control your weight, cholesterol levels or improve your energy levels, why not schedule a complimentary 15min consultation so that we can talk about your circumstances?

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