



communicating Food for Health

Bad “Good” HDL-Cholesterol

By James J. Kenney,
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For many years, most health-care providers and nutrition researchers have been telling Americans that HDL-cholesterol (HDL-C) is “good cholesterol” because it helps protect arteries from developing atherosclerosis and eventually coronary heart disease (CAD). However, more recent scientific evidence is refuting the simplistic conclusion that more HDL-C is always good.

This is not to say that people with higher HDL-C are not at lower risk of having heart attacks, but rather that it now appears that improving the functionality of HDL particles may be more important than simply increasing the HDL-C levels *per se*. Research indicates that drugs that increased HDL-C levels have not been effective at reducing heart attacks and other cardiovascular disease (CVD) events. In fact, these CETP-inhibitor drugs (i.e. torcetrapib, dalcetrapib,

evacetrapib) markedly increase HDL-C levels, lower LDL-C levels, and yet still have been shown to increase CVD events (1). So while higher HDL-C levels are generally associated with less CVD, it is now clear that a higher HDL-C is not necessarily beneficial.

Some diet and lifestyle changes that increase HDL-C levels do reduce CVD events such as quitting smoking, exercising, and getting rid of excess body weight (and keeping it off). However, there are no clinical trials that prove increasing HDL-C levels by replacing dietary carbohydrate with fat actually helps reduce the risk of CAD or slows the growth of atherosclerotic plaques. Nevertheless, for years it has been assumed that everything that increases HDL-C reduces CVD. This is unfortunate because for years the drop in HDL-C levels often seen when people adopt very-low-fat (VLF) diets has been used as the rationale for discouraging people from adopt-

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June '16

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2. Folic Acid
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Online: Clipart, Calendar, Recipes, PDF Handouts, Articles, This Month, Newsletter Archive

This unproven assumption has long trumped published research showing that VLF vegan or near vegan diets can reverse atherosclerosis and/or reduce the risk of CVD events.

ing vegan or near vegan VLF diets for treating and preventing CAD despite all the evidence indicating that CAD can actually be stopped and even reversed with near vegan and vegan VLF diets. Such diets have long been advocated by Morrison, Pritikin, Ornish, McDougal, Esselstyn, and others. One of the main reasons expert panels keep discouraging the use of VLF diets for patients at risk of CAD is this observation that such VLF diets frequently do result (at least initially) in the reduction of supposedly "good" HDL-C levels in most people. This reduction in "good" HDL-C, they have assumed, must be bad for arteries. As a result of this unproven assumption, the AHA, NCEP, ACC, and most recently the new 2015-2020 US Dietary Guidelines have been actively discouraging the use of VLF diets simply because they often do lower "good" HDL-C levels which they assume cannot be good for preventing or reducing CAD. This unproven assumption has long trumped published research showing that VLF vegan or near vegan diets can reverse atherosclerosis and/or re-

duce the risk of CVD events even in people with advanced CAD despite the fact that such diets often do result in reduced HDL-C (2).

However, if higher blood HDL-C levels do not necessarily lead to less atherosclerosis and a reduced risk of CAD, this may explain why VLF diets can be effective for preventing heart disease even if they do lower HDL-C levels. Perhaps VLF diets are improving the ability of HDL particles to remove cholesterol from the artery wall and bring it back to the liver. This process is known as reverse cholesterol transport (RCT). A new study examined HDL-C levels and CVD risk and showed that some people have a genetic mutation that results in their livers making fewer scavenger receptor B1s (SR-B1s). Because these SR-B1s are largely responsible for removing cholesterol from HDL particles in the blood (and likely remove dysfunctional HDLs from circulation too), it appears that things that result in fewer SR-B1s will slow the removal of HDL-C from the blood, resulting in higher HDL-C levels. However, increased HDL-C might

not be as protective against CAD as once believed by most cardiologists. The thinking about HDL and how it functions to affect RCT has been evolving. Recently the concept that more HDL-C levels does not directly protect against atherosclerosis and CAD has been supported by yet another line of research. This study's senior author, Daniel J. Rader, MD, said that "Our results indicate that some causes of raised HDL-C actually increase risk for heart disease. This is the first demonstration of a genetic mutation that raises HDL-C but increases risk of heart disease."

What Dr. Rader and his colleagues did was sequence the lipid-modifying regions of the genomes of 328 people who had markedly elevated HDL-C levels and compared them to those of a control group with much lower HDL-C levels in order to identify genetic mutations that were causing the high HDL-C levels. One of the genes they focused on was coded for SR-B1, which is the major

(Continued at <https://foodandhealth.com/bad-good-hdl-cholesterol/>).

Web Links for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Month:

We all know and love fresh fruits and vegetables, right? Well, June gives us an extra reason to celebrate: it's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Month!

Here are some of my favorite resources for presentations, email blasts, recipes, games, and infographics that highlight fresh fruits and vegetables.

Celebrate Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Month with... Fresh Fruits and Vegetables!
(<https://foodandhealth.com/celebrate-fresh-fruit-and-vegetable-month-with-fresh-fruits-and-vegetables/>)

This blog post is chock-full of fun ways for your clients to celebrate Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Month. Don't miss the ideas for a family garden, out-

ings to farmers' markets, and better meal planning!

Free Infographic for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Month
(<https://foodandhealth.com/fresh-fruit-vegetable-month/>)

Infographics are versatile educational tools that work well as addendums to email blasts, elements of displays and bulletin boards, and even on their own as handouts. This infographic for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Month features various common fruits and vegetables, highlighting exactly how much of each constitutes a MyPlate serving. It's a great way to demystify the process of eating enough fruits and vegetables.

Fruit and Vegetable Riddles
(<https://foodandhealth.com/june-is-fresh-fruit-and-vegetable-month/>)

Who doesn't love a fun game? This collection of fruit and veg-

etable riddles comes straight from Hollis Bass, MEd, RD, LD, and is sure to pep up any presentation or session that you have planned for June.

Enjoy Summer Fruit!
(<https://foodandhealth.com/enjoy-summer-fruit/>)

There are lots of ways to make the most out of summer produce. This post highlights some of the easiest and most effective strategies to bring fruit into a healthy eating pattern this summer. With simple recipes and stunning pictures, Enjoy Summer Fruit has everything you need to boost a celebration of fresh fruits and vegetables.

For more great resources, visit the **Nutrition Education Store** at <http://nutritioneducation-store.com>! It's full of posters, handouts, displays, games, prizes, and presentations that all feature lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.

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