

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

August 26, 2005

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776  
e-mail:makeith@ifas.ufl.edu

**Eat More, Lower Your Cholesterol? Maybe.**

Every time you turn around there's something new in the grocery making a claim to be healthy for your heart or to lower your cholesterol. There's orange juice and yogurt, cereal and margarine. You'd think you could eat your way to zero cholesterol!

Unfortunately it doesn't work that way. Most of these foods are basing their claims on plant sterols. These are ingredients that are very similar to cholesterol but that are made by plants. Many come from soy. They work, but there are tricks.

It is true that clinical studies have shown that eating enough plant sterols can have a good effect on human cholesterol levels. In some studies people's cholesterol levels went down from 5 to 15%. That can be a significant improvement. The FDA does allow certain foods to put these claims on their labels because the research is solid. Thousands of people were involved, and they didn't know whether they were getting the sterol or not until the studies were over.

However, if you read the fine print of the claims, the claim is that eating their food *along with eating a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol* may reduce the risk of heart disease. That's one of the tricks. You can't just eat more margarine or yogurt and expect your cholesterol to go down. You still have to cut the fat in your diet, especially the saturated fats.

The other trick is that you have to eat enough of the plant sterols, every day, for a long enough time. Depending on the actual sterol, that dose varies from under 1g to over 5 g a day, every day. And it might take months before any change occurs. The

amount of the food you need to eat depends on how much sterol is added to each serving. You might like to eat two cups of yogurt or a tablespoon of margarine every day. But you might get tired of it too. These products are similar to medicines, you have to keep taking them for them to be effective.

For some people all the fortified yogurt and orange juice in the store might not make much difference. These plant sterols work by preventing us from absorbing the cholesterol in our diet. But a large part of the cholesterol in our bodies is made by our own livers, from the saturated fat we eat. If your liver is working overtime making cholesterol, not absorbing some from your diet won't make much difference.

It is also important to look at the other ingredients. If the yogurt has a lot of added sugar or corn syrup, then you might end up with higher triglycerides instead. The fat and oil in the margarine still has the same 9 calories in every gram. If you don't eat much margarine now, adding extra fat to your diet can add calories, and pounds.

So what's the bottom line? Adding foods fortified with added plant sterols can be one useful change to a healthier diet. But it is only one part, and the rest of the diet and lifestyle still has to be healthy.

Reduce the fat, especially the saturated fat, in the diet. Increase the amount of exercise you get. Eat more high fiber foods. And if you eat yogurt on a regular basis, you can choose the ones with heart health claims. If you want margarine on your toast, use one of the healthy heart varieties. If you're doing all the right things all ready, then maybe adding some of these foods will give your cholesterol level another push down.

If you love cheese but are trying to avoid the fat, here's a recipe specially developed to use the low-fat cheddar. You get the flavor, not the fat. Just don't overheat it or it will get tough. There's fresh zucchini in the market now too, enjoy it.

## Broiled Zucchini and Cheddar Rounds

8 slices Cuban bread, ½ inch thick	1 Tbsp minced garlic
1/4 tsp olive oil	1/4 tsp salt
1 medium zucchini, finely diced	2 small tomatoes, diced
black pepper to taste	1 C grated low fat cheese (Cabot's 50% light was used)

Broil bread in preheated broiler or toaster oven until golden on both sides.

In skillet, combine oil, garlic and salt. Saute until you can smell the garlic. Add zucchini and tomatoes and cook and stir until tender. Add pepper if desired. Transfer vegetables to bowl and stir in cheese until just melted. Divide onto slices of toasted bread. Serve hot. Serves 8.

(Recipe from Cabot Cheese)

*Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.*

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an Equal Employment Opportunity - Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap or national origin. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS, STATE OF FLORIDA, IFAS, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COOPERATING