

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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The unfortunate truth is that many of us have too much cholesterol floating around in our blood. So what? If you think of your blood vessels as the plumbing in your house, then cholesterol is like a lot of warm wax poured down the drain. You know what will happen next. The wax starts sticking to the insides of the pipes. Pretty soon a pipe or two are plugged up. Depending on where the plugs happen, either the water doesn't come out of the faucet, or it doesn't go down the drain. Either way, it's a mess.

Cholesterol is waxy. It's not really a fat, but it travels with fat in our foods. In our internal plumbing, it sticks to the sides of the blood vessels. Eventually enough builds up that the vessel is plugged. If the blood can't get through it's not carrying oxygen to the parts of the body downstream from the plug. Depending on where the plug occurs the effect on the body can be drastic. A blocked artery in your heart? That's a heart attack. If the plug occurs in a vessel in your head, then it's a stroke. The muscles and brain need oxygen to keep working. No blood, no oxygen, the muscles and nerves die. Recovering from either is a long, slow process. So why not do what you can to avoid the blockage?

Now here's the tricky part. Most of us think that if we have too much cholesterol all ready we should stop eating more cholesterol. Unfortunately, most of the cholesterol that causes problems doesn't come from the cholesterol on our plates. Most of it is made by our own livers! When we eat saturated fat, our livers turn it into cholesterol.

So to protect ourselves, the first step is to eat less saturated fat. If the liver doesn't get sat-fat, it won't make as much cholesterol. Read food labels to decide which foods your heart can afford to eat. The higher the saturated fat, the more risky the food can be. Saturated fat is solid fat. It mostly comes from animals, but palm, palm kernel and coconut oils also have a lot of saturated fat. Limit them too.

Second step - do eat less cholesterol. Cholesterol only comes from animals. So more beans and peas, less sausage and ham is a good idea. More fat free milk and low fat cheese is another good idea. Interestingly, there's no evidence that for most people avoiding eggs is helpful. But if your doctor says to avoid it, do so.

The third step for a long time has been to eat more oatmeal, barley and other high fiber grains. These fibers help our liver and gall bladder take cholesterol out of the blood.

Now there's a fourth diet step that FDA agrees is useful. Even though only animals make cholesterol, plants make things very much like cholesterol. These plant sterols and stanols can prevent our bodies from absorbing cholesterol that we eat. By adding plant sterols and stanols to some foods we won't absorb the cholesterol from other foods in the meal.

There are various margarines and now some caramel-like candies on the market that contain plant sterols and stanols. They will help lower your cholesterol levels, *if* you read and follow the fine print. You need at least 1.3 g of plant sterol esters or 3.4 g of plant stanol esters to have an effect. FDA says a product must have at least 0.8 g of sterols in a serving to be allowed to put a heart health claim on the label.

But these only work for the meal when you use them. If you use an enhanced

margarine at lunch but eat brats for dinner, sorry, you'll still get the cholesterol from the brats! So lower the fat, increase the oatmeal and barley, and use the plant sterols or stanols if you really want margarine. Put it all together can really help.

Here's a recipe for some heart healthy cookies. If you use red and green candied cherries you could even send them for Christmas presents! Enjoy.

Happy Heart Oatmeal Cookies

3/4 C packed brown sugar	1/2 C sugar
1 C low fat vanilla yogurt	2 egg whites, lightly beaten
1 Tbsp oil	2 Tbsp skim milk
2 tsp vanilla	1 1/2 C flour
1 tsp baking soda	1 tsp apple pie spice
3 C quick oatmeal (not instant)	1 C raisins or other dried fruit

Heat oven to 350° F. In large bowl combine sugar and wet ingredients. In another bowl combine dry ingredients except oats and fruit. Stir dry ingredients into wet. Stir in oats and dried fruit. Spread into 9x13 inch baking pan. Bake 30 minutes, until golden brown. Cool on wire rack, then cut into bars. Store in air tight container.

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