

The questionable wisdom of a low-fat diet and cholesterol reduction.

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The prevalent wisdom that a low-fat diet and cholesterol reduction are essential to good cardiovascular health is coming under increased scrutiny. An examination of the foundations of this view suggests that in many respects it was ill-conceived from the outset and, with the accumulation of new evidence, it is becoming progressively less tenable.

Cross-sectional, longitudinal and cross-cultural investigations have variously suggested that the relationship between dietary fat intake and death from heart disease is positive, negative and random. **These data are incompatible with the view that dietary fat intake has any causal role in cardiovascular health.**

Although hypercholesterolemia is associated with increased liability to death from heart disease, it is as frequently associated with increased overall life expectancy as with decreased life expectancy. These findings are incompatible with labeling hypercholesterolemia an overall health hazard. Moreover, it is questionable if the cardiovascular liability associated with hypercholesterolemia is either causal or reversible.

The complex relationships between diet, serum cholesterol, atherosclerosis and mortality and their interactions with genetic and environmental factors suggest that the effects of simple dietary prescriptions are unlikely to be predictable, let alone beneficial. These cautions are borne out by **numerous studies which have shown that multifactorial primary intervention to lower cholesterol levels is as likely to increase death from cardiovascular causes as to decrease it. Importantly, the only significant overall effect of cholesterol-lowering intervention that has ever been shown is increased mortality.**

The stress and helplessness associated with misapprehensions as to the dangers of dietary fat and the asceticism inherent in the war on cholesterol have considerable implications for health practices. Recent research in behavioral immunology suggests that stress and helplessness are likely to compromise immunity and promote ill-health.

What is more important:

- 1. worrying about your cholesterol levels... or,**
- 2. actively working on becoming and staying healthy?**

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