

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Good HDL-Cholesterol Not So Good After All”

We have been brain washed into believing that we should keep levels of the "bad" cholesterol in check, while "good" cholesterol should be high in order to protect against heart disease and other cardiovascular conditions. But, new research is showing that “good” cholesterol is not so good at preventing heart disease, which includes heart attacks and strokes. Despite advertisements to the contrary, the precise interplay between the 'good' and the 'bad' kinds of cholesterol, as well as their impact on heart disease, have yet to be unraveled or scientifically proven. We have been told by the American Heart Association that high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is “good” cholesterol and that we should expect that higher levels are better for our cardiovascular health. However, a new study at the University of Oxford, Peking University explored the health effects of CETP genetic variants, in 150,000 Chinese adults enrolled into the China Kadoorie Biobank (CKB). The researchers found that CETP genetic variants raised levels of HDL-C substantially, but did not lower LDL-C and did not lower the risk of cardiovascular diseases such as heart disease and stroke. There was also no effect on atherosclerotic plaques and thickness of the arteries, or on other conditions such as diabetes and kidney disease. Of greater concern is the fact that the study found increased risk of eye diseases, a finding which is supported by other genetic studies in East Asian and Western populations. Again, raising HDL-C without also lowering LDL-C did not result in a benefit for heart disease or stroke. Unsupported theories and opinions have flourished in the area of cholesterol control and pharmaceutical companies have led the pack in spewing out unsubstantiated cholesterol mythology. Some physicians have joined drug companies in “campaigns of persuasion” in pushing what some experts have called the biggest scam in modern medicine. Remember that cholesterol-lowering drugs, statins, are the biggest money makers in the world. Also, the journey from basic biology to large-scale randomized trials in humans is long and expensive: the estimated cost of getting a single product to market is over \$2 billion. Consequently, large reliable randomized clinical trials are few and far between. Drug companies have relied on observational studies, which lack scientific proof. Many studies on cholesterol-lowering drugs have shown increases in a multitude of adverse effects following lowered cholesterol levels, including reduced muscle gain with exercise, increased risk of dying from kidney cancer or succumbing to an infection post-surgery.

In the America that I love, we need reliable scientific studies to base our treatments on and not rely on drug company propaganda. Heart disease kills over 600,000 Americans yearly. So, stop smoking, maintain a healthy weight and always consult a knowledgeable physician on these matters.

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