

Complete Health Truths

Exploring natural health by getting back to the basics.

New Thinking on Cholesterol and Health

By Christina Mroz, Health Coach

The Skinny on Fats

By [Mary Enig, PhD](#), and [Sally Fallon](#)

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What about Cholesterol?

Our blood vessels can become damaged in a number of ways—through irritations caused by free radicals or viruses, or because they are structurally weak—and when this happens, the body's natural healing substance steps in to repair the damage. That substance is cholesterol. Cholesterol is a high-molecular-weight alcohol that is manufactured in the liver and in most human cells. Like saturated fats, the cholesterol we make and consume plays many vital roles:

- Along with saturated fats, cholesterol in the cell membrane gives our cells necessary stiffness and stability. When the diet contains an excess of polyunsaturated fatty acids, these replace saturated fatty acids in the cell membrane, so that the cell walls actually become flabby. When this happens, cholesterol from the blood is "driven" into the tissues to give them structural integrity. This is why serum cholesterol levels may go down temporarily when we replace saturated fats with polyunsaturated oils in the diet.⁴⁶
- Cholesterol acts as a precursor to vital corticosteroids, hormones that help us deal with stress and protect the body against heart disease and cancer; and to the sex hormones like androgen, testosterone, estrogen and progesterone.
- Cholesterol is a precursor to vitamin D, a very important fat-soluble vitamin needed for healthy bones and nervous system, proper growth, mineral metabolism, muscle tone, insulin production, reproduction and immune system function.
- The bile salts are made from cholesterol. Bile is vital for digestion and assimilation of fats in the diet.
- Recent research shows that cholesterol acts as an antioxidant.⁴⁷ This is the likely explanation for the fact that cholesterol levels go up with age. As an antioxidant, cholesterol protects us against free radical damage that leads to heart disease and cancer.
- Cholesterol is needed for proper function of serotonin receptors in the brain.⁴⁸ Serotonin is the body's natural "feel-good" chemical. Low cholesterol levels have been linked to aggressive and violent behavior, depression and suicidal tendencies.
- Mother's milk is especially rich in cholesterol and contains a special enzyme that helps the baby utilize this nutrient. Babies and children need cholesterol-rich foods throughout their growing years to ensure proper development of the brain and nervous system.
- Dietary cholesterol plays an important role in maintaining the health of the intestinal wall.⁴⁹ This is why low-cholesterol vegetarian diets can lead to leaky gut syndrome and other intestinal disorders.

Cholesterol is not the cause of heart disease but rather a potent antioxidant weapon against free radicals in the blood, and a repair substance that helps heal arterial damage (although the arterial plaques themselves contain very little cholesterol.) However, like fats, cholesterol may be damaged by exposure to heat and oxygen. This damaged or oxidized cholesterol seems to promote both injury to the arterial cells as well as a pathological buildup

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of plaque in the arteries.⁵⁰ Damaged cholesterol is found in powdered eggs, in powdered milk (added to reduced-fat milks to give them body) and in meats and fats that have been heated to high temperatures in frying and other high-temperature processes.

High serum cholesterol levels often indicate that the body needs cholesterol to protect itself from high levels of altered, free-radical-containing fats. Just as a large police force is needed in a locality where crime occurs frequently, so cholesterol is needed in a poorly nourished body to protect the individual from a tendency to heart disease and cancer. Blaming coronary heart disease on cholesterol is like blaming the police for murder and theft in a high crime area.

Poor thyroid function (hypothyroidism) will often result in high cholesterol levels. When thyroid function is poor, usually due to a diet high in sugar and low in usable iodine, fat-soluble vitamins and other nutrients, the body floods the blood with cholesterol as an adaptive and protective mechanism, providing a superabundance of materials needed to heal tissues and produce protective steroids. Hypothyroid individuals are particularly susceptible to infections, heart disease and cancer.⁵¹

Why are fats necessary for good health?

- Fats are building blocks for cell membranes, hormones, enzymes and neurotransmitters (messages from your brain to your body that make you think, feel and move).
- Fats slow down food absorption so you can go longer without feeling hungry.
- Fats are needed to absorb and use vitamins A, D, E & K.
- Fats help to keep us warm and cushion organs.
- The brain is 60% fat, and needs fat for connecting brain cells and making sure signals get through.
- Fats give us energy.
- Fat holds our organs in place and insulates us from the cold.
- Fat helps maintain our body temperature.
- Fat helps keep our insulin and blood sugar levels even.

Specific roles of saturated fats are:

- They constitute at least 50% of all cell membranes.
- They play a vital role in bone health; without them, calcium cannot be effectively incorporated into the skeletal system.
- They protect the liver from alcohol and other toxins.
- They enhance the immune system.
- Without them, we cannot properly utilize essential fatty acids, such as the all-important omega-3.
- Saturated fat is the perfect food for the heart, as the fat around the heart is highly saturated.
- The short and medium-chain saturated fatty acids found in butter, coconut and palm oil have important anti-microbial properties. They protect us against harmful microorganisms in the digestive tract.

Resources and Further Reading:

(Decide for yourself on the issue of low/high cholesterol.)

The Biblical Health Institute

http://www.westonaprice.org/moderndiseases/benefits_cholest.html

http://www.mercola.com/2005/may/28/cholesterol_heart.htm

http://www.mercola.com/2003/may/14/cholesterol_levels.htm

http://www.westonaprice.org/knowyourfats/fats_phony.html

<http://www.westonaprice.org/askdoctor/lowcholesterol.html>

<http://www.westonaprice.org/knowyourfats/skinny.html>