

Cholesterol-Lowering Foods More Effective than Low-Saturated Fat Diet: Study

By: *Nutritional Outlook*

Canadian researchers believe that a diet program involving FDA-recognized heart-healthy foods may be more effective at lowering low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol than a low-saturated fat diet.

In a multi-center trial, the researchers assigned 351 hyperlipidemic adults to one of three dietary programs for six months: a control diet or an intervention diet containing heart-healthy food components, with dietician visits on two occasions ("routine") or seven occasions ("intensive"). Changes in LDL cholesterol were measured over the course of the study.

The control diet emphasized low-fat dairy, whole grain cereals, fruits, vegetables, and avoidance of heart-healthy foods from the intervention diets.

Per 1000 kcal, the intervention diet aimed for 0.94 g of plant sterols, 9.8 g of viscous fibers (from oats, barley, and psyllium), 22.5 g of soy protein, and 22.5 g of nuts. Consumption of peas, beans, and lentil was encouraged.

"The specific food components used in the portfolio have well-established cholesterol-lowering properties and are recognized by the U.S. FDA as justifying a heart health claim," wrote lead researcher David Jenkins, MD, of St. Michael's Hospital (Toronto). "Review articles and meta-analyses have confirmed [LDL-cholesterol] benefits for viscous fibers, plant sterols, soy proteins, and nuts."

By six months, participants in the control group had experienced a 3.0% decrease in LDL cholesterol. But participants in the intervention groups experienced significant reductions of 13.8% and 13.1% with the intensive and routine regimens, respectively.

With just two clinical visits and a food-specific dieting program, the researchers concluded that such a strategy might be suitable as a clinical approach.

Study limitations included a high drop-out rate of 22.6%, predominantly white participants, and participants who were considered to be at low to intermediate risk of cardiovascular disease. The effect of this type of dietary intervention on high-risk, obese subjects remains to be seen.

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