

[Cholesterol - THE VILLAIN?](#)

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Tandavan, Doctor Cholesterol is a modified fat called a sterol. It is very much like a wax, insoluble in the bloodstream and seems to be carried through the blood attached to complicated molecules called lipoproteins, "fatty proteins." The high density lipoproteins (HDL) are considered "good" and low density ones (LDL) are "bad." The blood levels of cholesterol are usually given as total cholesterol; but to have any meaning the levels should be given as HDL/LDL ratios or each separately.

Cholesterol is manufactured within the body, primarily in the liver but also within every cell in the body. It is essential to the construction of the cell membrane which protects the inner portion of all cells. It is also important in the production of the protective barrier of the skin, construction of the steroid hormones and in the production of vitamins. About 80% of the blood serum cholesterol is used in the production of bile salts, so essential to the metabolism of dietary fats.

Why then is it considered a "Villain"? Cholesterol is found in the plaques of blood vessels that are narrowed (arteriosclerosis) to the extent that blood flow to the heart muscle, kidneys, brain and other vital organs and tissues is cut off causing heart attacks and other fatal conditions. Thus many consider it the causative factor. But scientific experimentation shows that cholesterol is not the cause of this condition. High serum cholesterol may only be a symptom of an impending arteriosclerosis - one of many factors producing these plaques.

It has also been shown that the dietary intake of cholesterol has little, if any, correlation with high serum levels of this nutrient. If excessive intake occurs, the body decreases production to maintain its "normal" levels.

However, in the development of arteriosclerosis, a relationship has been shown

repeatedly between high serum cholesterol and other factors - heredity, age, hormones, nutrition, tobacco smoking, excessive alcohol intake, obesity, debilitating diseases, hypertension and unknown contributors.

Recommended levels for normal total cholesterol are below 200 mgm/daily (National Institute of Health). If above this, it must be broken down into the HDL, LDL, VLDL and triglyceride levels to get a true evaluation. Cholesterol testing is not always reliable, so if you have an abnormal value, have a second or third test. Do not accept tests at shopping malls, health fairs, street stations, etc.

Even though high serum cholesterol levels merely indicate future problems, if elevated, they should be lowered to acceptable levels. There are many natural methods of lowering the serum levels such as: 1) use of more dietary fiber especially that found in oats, legumes, fruits, psyllium seed and guar gum, (though recognized for years, fiber was only recently discovered by the advertising media); 2) Omega-3 oil, an essential fatty acid found most abundantly in fish, but also in some plants, vegetables and nuts; especially in flax seed, spinach, mustard greens, walnuts, wheat germ oil, soybean lecithin, tofu, buttermilk and possibly some sea weeds; 3) lowering sugar intake; 4) increasing intake of Vitamin C, E, A, B15, and niacin; 5) light exercise; 6) lecithin increase in diet; 7) increased garlic and onions in the diet; 8) elimination or marked decrease in coffee intake; 9) addition of selenium, chromium, olive oil, alfalfa sprouts, avocados, and other natural substances to the diet. Through the years other products (and surely new ones in the future) have been shown to lower the cholesterol levels. Probably all that is needed to reduce serum cholesterol (and the possible increased risks for arteriosclerosis) is to partake of a natural, balanced vegetarian diet. In a lactovegetarian diet the only extraneous sources of cholesterol are milk products (only animal products have cholesterol), intake of which is easily controlled, although we do not believe that it is very important to keep it drastically low.