

Editorial

Cholesterol in Blood Depends More on Genetics than Diet

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Cholesterol is not a nutrient of concern for overconsumption. The point made is that replacing all foods containing cholesterol from your diet does not make the amount of cholesterol in the blood go down. That said, more important than the total amount of cholesterol in our blood from a heart artery problem is the amount of the 'good' cholesterol. And the amount of the good cholesterol in our blood depends more on genetics than diet.

And as such limiting cholesterol intake does not make sense. Also, people try and fill themselves up with sugary foods and carbohydrates especially of the refined sort when they avoid fatty foods. The reason is simple, fatty foods 'satisfy' or fill a person up more easily than non-fatty foods and a sated person does not get hungry too soon.

The other problem with removing cholesterol rich fat from food is that the prepared, processed and fast food suppliers all try and add more sugar and salt to their foods to make them taste better. Increased amount of refined sugar and refined starches play an important role in the recent 'epidemic' of adult type diabetes. High salt/sodium possibly contributes to high blood pressure.

So, avoiding cholesterol in food is not the main concern rather what the removed cholesterol is eventually replaced with.

A Healthy dietary pattern is higher in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low or non-fatty dairy, seafood, legumes and nuts; lower in red and processed meats, and low in sugar, sweetened foods and drinks and refined grains. Current research also strongly demonstrates that regular physical activity promotes health and reduces chronic disease risk.

Nutrient data from a representative sample of the US population of ages two and older indicate that: vitamin A, vitamin D, vitamin E, folate, vitamin C, calcium, and magnesium are under consumed relative to the requirement.

A country where close to a majority of people barely fulfill their recommended daily needs for caloric intakes, especially women and children, the above recommendations provide two important pieces of information. First, that diets high in animal fats and 'red meat' that so many of the poor and even some in the middle class long for are not necessarily good for them.

The important point is that less expensive forms of calories and protein like unrefined grains, vegetables and legumes (daals), on the whole, form a better basis for a healthy diet. And for those

that can afford cooking oils of their choice, oils from vegetable origins (olive oil, canola oil, etc.) are better than oils of animal origin. Oils that are liquid at room temperature (for people in Lahore-room temperature means 25 degrees centigrade, give or take), are better than those that are solid at room temperature. However, it is important to remember the old adage, everything in moderation.

One thing that needs to be considered by the well-to-do is that eating cows and other animals that are bred for this purpose is just bad. Cattle breeding requires areas for producing feed that in cattle breeding countries can produce deforestation and diversion of available agricultural land towards producing cattle feed. Besides that, breeding cattle stresses water supplies and produces ecological damage.

As the world population increases and more people are able to afford meat, the damage to the environment from cattle breeding will become more pronounced. Eventually people will have to make a choice between eating meat or letting most of Bangladesh disappear into the Bay of Bengal. Eventually all forms of meat including that from chicken and pork, all forms of 'animal' proteins are going to become difficult to procure.

The 'under consumption' of micronutrients like vitamins and minerals which are of tremendous importance to normal and healthy function of the human body, is rampant. For decades physicians have advised patients that those who eat a 'proper' diet do not require 'dietary supplements'. This is even more so true of people in Pakistan including even the well-off that can eat whatever they want, that they still do not have a proper diet.

Iodine to salt virtually eliminated enlargement of thyroid glands (goiter). The same can be said of adding Vitamin D and Calcium to foods like milk and bread that virtually eliminated 'Rickets'. But even so as we all live longer, even in Pakistan it is important that we really start eating unprocessed foods.

In young women especially those who might get pregnant, Iron and Folate supplements are absolutely necessary. And for those that cannot afford them especially among children and pregnant women, provision of many of these micronutrients has to be a public health imperative.