

Cholesterol not dangerous, study says

The cholesterol scare is misleading, say 30 Texas A&M University professors who risked their health to prove it. The professors participated in an experiment conducted by Dr. Raymond Reiser, a lipids biochemist at Texas A&M. Reiser said he began the project after the American Heart Association recommended that people eliminate eggs from their diets as a guard against cholesterol build-up.

More recently, the Senate Select committee on Dietary Goals for the United States recommended that people substitute fish and poultry for red meat, also to reduce cholesterol build-up.

Reiser said the recommendations were made on inconclusive research. "I wanted to determine what will happen when people leading a normal, day-to-day lifestyle eat meat and eggs," Reiser said.

Dr. Barbara O'Brien, a worker in the study, said the first step in the experiment was to select participants.

"We went to the staff meetings of the animal science, poultry, and biochemistry departments and discussed our plans. From there, word got around and soon we were receiving calls from volunteers," O'Brien said.

O'Brien said only men faculty members between the ages of 31 and 61 were considered.

No conclusive research can be done on women unless the group is similar in hormone make-up, O'Brien said.

She added, "Since some women take the pill, and some are pregnant or may become pregnant," the variation in hormone levels would have produced too great a problem.

The 31-61 age bracket is considered the "risk age" because most heart attacks occur within that age range, Reiser said.

"This is also the period of a man's most highly productive years, and the group in which we are most interested," Reiser said.

O'Brien said 37 professors volunteered. They were screened with personal interviews and physical examinations.

"We took blood samples to determine cholesterol levels, and we considered other factors such as blood pressure, weight, serum glucose, and triglycerates, to try to obtain healthy, normal participants," she said.

Four diets were followed by the participants, with each diet lasting six weeks.

The first diet included three "visible" eggs, (those not contained by other foods), fish and poultry every day. No red meat was allowed.

The second diet was made up of fish and poultry, with no red meat or visible eggs.

The third diet included red meat, but no visible eggs.

The last diet included both red meat and three visible eggs per day.

The participants were "on their honor" to follow the diets. They were instructed to list all cholesterol-containing foods eaten, and signify any deviations made.

Their lifestyles were not interrupted, with exception of eggs and type of meat in their diets," O'Brien said.

The experiment concluded that red meat and eggs do not contribute to cholesterol build-up.

"In fact, the groups on the heavier egg diets during the final six weeks requested another six weeks, just to see if anything would happen," O'Brien said. "No build-up of cholesterol was detected."

The "bomb" in this whole hassle over cholesterol and coronaries is an association by people of cholesterol with fats," Reiser said. "But, the fact is, lean meat contains more cholesterol than does fat meat."

So, fish and poultry, being lean meat, contains as much cholesterol as does red meat."

An "extra" participant, Dr. W.F. Krueger, who had a triple coronary heart bypass, said he had "no problem" with the diets. "My cholesterol is within normal range, and so are my triglycerates," Krueger said. He is head of the poultry science department and said he wanted to see for himself about high egg diets.

O'Brien said that only one participant showed a significant cholesterol increase, from 227 to 294 milligrams.

"He was on the three-egg per day diet, but he was also visiting relatives in England. He said he was eating many high-cholesterol foods along with the eggs. He said a rich cream was eaten at almost every meal. Essentially, he was in a very high-cholesterol-eating area," O'Brien said.

The experiment proved that the body keeps a balance of cholesterol, and excess amounts are passed out. "As far as the correlation of high cholesterol and heart attacks, we have no way of knowing that," O'Brien said.

"The body needs cholesterol for certain functions. Our organs, primarily the liver, makes cholesterol.

"We have a regulatory mechanism that shuts off cholesterol production if a lot of cholesterol is taken in through foods. If we aren't getting enough cholesterol, the liver makes it.

"So, we get a relatively constant level," O'Brien said.



Dr. Barbara O'Brien works in the lab, doing research on the effect of cholesterol in the daily diet. Battalion photo by Paige Beasley



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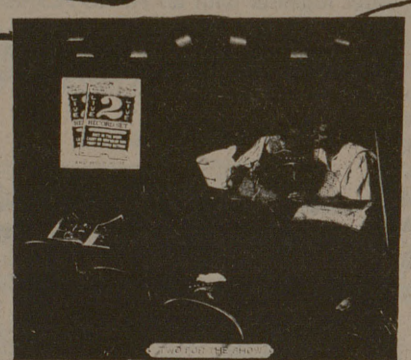
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