

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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STUDY SHOWS DIET WITHOUT DRUGS CAN LOWER CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

DALLAS -- February 14, 1994 -- Men can lower high cholesterol levels significantly, without taking drugs, by following a moderate diet low in saturated fats and cholesterol, researchers at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center have concluded.

In a study published in the Feb. 14 issue of the Archives of Internal Medicine, Dr. Margo A. Denke, assistant professor of internal medicine in the Center for Human Nutrition, and Dr. Scott M. Grundy, director of the Center for Human Nutrition, said the "Step One" diet recommended by the American Heart Association and the National Cholesterol Education Program was effective in reducing cholesterol when combined with appropriate dietary counseling.

"We found the same cholesterol lowering can be achieved in outpatients as in people who are hospitalized on a metabolic ward, where their diet is completely controlled," Denke said.

The researchers studied 50 men who had elevated cholesterol levels. First, the men spent a month on a high-fat, high-saturated-fat diet similar to that eaten by many Americans. Cholesterol and triglyceride levels were measured five times during the last two weeks of the diet period.

The patients were then given nutritional counseling about following the Step One diet. "We carefully counseled each individual on how to exchange foods and slowly change his eating habits," Denke said. Patients on the Step One diet

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were counseled to limit their total fat intake to less than 30 percent of calories, limit saturated fat to less than 10 percent of calories and restrict dietary cholesterol to less than 300 milligrams per day. This is the least-stringent of the cholesterol-lowering diets.

The patients then followed the Step One diet for four months. They were again tested five times for cholesterol and triglyceride levels during the last two weeks of the Step One diet.

Both total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL, the "bad" cholesterol) levels dropped 8 percent for the study group. During the high-fat-diet portion of the study, half the men had LDL levels greater than 190 milligrams per deciliter. The number of men in this high-risk category was reduced by half after they followed the Step One diet.

The researchers also noted individual responses to the cholesterol-lowering diet. "We found marked individual variability," Denke said. About one-third of the patients responded extremely well, even better than expected. Another third were less responsive than expected. Failure to comply adequately to the diet explained some of the relatively poor response, Denke said. A review of the subjects' diet records suggested that one-fourth of the subjects had changed their diets very little in spite of intensive counseling.

Biological factors, such as a suppressed activity of the LDL receptors, may explain why a few other patients did not respond well to the diet, Denke said.

"The current study supports the utility of dietary therapy for primary prevention in patients with high-risk LDL-cholesterol levels," Denke said. "This

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form of therapy may eliminate the need for drug consideration for primary prevention of coronary heart disease in a sizeable portion of patients."

Denke said the results were encouraging. "Diet does work for the majority of people, so eating right can pay off," she said.

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