

Plant Sterols: A Natural way to Lower Cholesterol

Here's a fascinating story about the balance in nature. All animals – you and I and the animal foods we eat – make and need cholesterol. Life can't go on without it. Similarly, all plants make and need a virtually identical family of substances called phytosterol.

We manufacture cholesterol in our livers, and need it for a wide variety of life functions, from hormone production to digestion to cellular formation. Unfortunately, many of us have a genetic trait for making too much, and we add fuel to the fire by consuming foods that contain more cholesterol. And elevated cholesterol levels in the blood are a major risk factor for heart disease.

It turns out that phytosterols, otherwise known as plant sterols, have a molecular structure so similar to that of cholesterol that they block the usual absorption of cholesterol. Now, here's the really neat part: literally hundreds of research studies over many years have proven that taking plant sterols on a regular basis with meals can have a dramatic effect. On average, the bad, artery-clogging LDL cholesterol goes down by up to 8-15% percent while the total cholesterol falls by 10 percent.

Plant sterols are concentrated in the seeds and oils of plants. But it would be very difficult to consume enough of those foods to get enough plant sterols to get a cholesterol-lowering effect. In fact, you would need to eat about 20 pounds of vegetables per day!

In the past, the only way we could get large amounts of plant sterols was in supplements, and, more recently, in margarine products. That's because plant sterols would not dissolve in water and thus could not be easily incorporated into other foods.

But Cargill Health & Food Technologies, has changed all that, by developing a technique that allows plant sterols to readily dissolve in fluids of all sorts. Products are already on the supermarket shelves carrying the trademark "CoroWise™."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has allowed food companies to make the health claim that plant sterols, when part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may help reduce the risk of heart disease by lowering cholesterol levels.

It's a wise shopping choice to select foods containing these plant sterols. Look for additional food choices in the coming months.

The best part about this natural approach to cholesterol management is that serious side effects have not been observed in any clinical studies. The Food and Drug Administration has accepted the safety of plant sterols for use in foods and dietary supplements.

For some men and women, just the cholesterol reduction possible with the addition of plant sterols to the diet will be sufficient to achieve healthy levels.

So, next time you go grocery shopping, be sure to pick up some of the products containing CoroWise™ plant sterols. It's the natural approach to cholesterol management.

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