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News Release

## **Demystifying Cholesterol**

Chances are you are concerned about cholesterol, on a low cholesterol diet, or you know someone who is on a low cholesterol diet. There is such a concern about high blood cholesterol because it is a risk factor for coronary heart disease. Even if you do not have high cholesterol, it is important you know the facts and how to control cholesterol because it can affect people of all ages.

Your body naturally produces cholesterol. It is a soft, fat-like substance that circulates through your blood stream and is used to form cell membranes and some hormones. The liver mostly produces the cholesterol needed by your body at about 1,000 milligrams a day. Foods are the other source of cholesterol. Cholesterol is found in meat, poultry, fish, egg yolks, and dairy products. Plant-based foods do not contain cholesterol and recent studies have shown that some of these foods may have a positive impact on the reduction of blood cholesterol.

Cholesterol is essential for a healthy body but too much can be a problem, especially if there is too much “bad” cholesterol. Cholesterol is carried through the bloodstream by lipoproteins. The two lipoproteins that are used for determining your risk of coronary heart disease are low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and high-density lipoprotein (HDL).

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) is known as “bad” cholesterol. LDL carries a large percent of cholesterol in the blood. Some of this cholesterol is used in building cells but when too much is in the bloodstream it sticks to artery walls and becomes plaque when combined with other substances. Plaque is a thick, hard, fatty deposit that can build up in arteries and narrow the arteries so that blood flow is reduced. This condition, known as atherosclerosis, can increase the risk of heart attack or stroke.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) is called “good” cholesterol. HDL circulates in the bloodstream and appears to remove free cholesterol from the bloodstream and takes it back to the liver where it is recycled for other uses. An HDL of 60 mg/dL or greater is considered protective and seems to lower the risk of heart attack and stroke.

In order to help maintain the appropriate amounts of HDL and LDL, the American Heart Association recommends that you limit your intake of foods high in saturated fats and trans fats to less than 10 percent of total calories, limit your intake of cholesterol, eat 5 or

more servings of fruits and vegetables a day, include a variety of whole grains everyday, eat fish at least twice a week, maintain a healthy weight through exercise and balancing calorie intake to needs, eat less than 2,400 mg sodium a day, and limit your intake of alcohol. Becoming aware of cholesterol and how to be heart healthy is important for a healthy future.

If you have questions or would like more information on this topic please contact Cheryl Vasse, Regional Extension Agent-Human Nutrition, Diet and Health with the St. Clair County Extension at (205) 338-9416 or email [vassecl@auburn.edu](mailto:vassecl@auburn.edu).

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