

## The Cholesterol Myth

By Harry Boys

Cholesterol lowering statins are now the most profitable drug family, with annual sales of around \$26 billion for the pharmaceutical industry, supposedly so good for us that some doctors even advocate adding them to mains water.

The theory that high fat foods cause heart disease originates from animal research in the 1950s which demonstrated that cholesterol fed to rabbits caused atherosclerosis. Of course animal research from the same period also led medical science to believe that thalidomide was safe. Epidemiological evidence from the populations of seven countries showed a direct correlation between heart disease and animal fats, and alongside this “lipid theory” was the hypothesis that polyunsaturated vegetable fats could reduce cholesterol.

The Seven Countries Study excluded evidence from 15 out of the 22 countries studied, which together would have contradicted the diet-cholesterol link. And the Framingham study, which has tracked the heart health of the inhabitants of a small town in Massachusetts since 1948, found that people with low cholesterol were more likely to die from heart disease. A 1994 study of 997 people over seventy found no association between high cholesterol and heart attack or death from any cause including congestive heart disease; and statistical evidence suggests that higher cholesterol is associated with lower mortality.

This is hardly surprising: cholesterol is vital to the control of inflammation and infection, is needed for the creation of bile to help digestion, and for the hormonal system. It is required by the nervous system and for the synthesis of Vitamin D, and protects against dementia and cognitive decline. Indeed, statins cause Parkinson’s disease, memory loss, confusion and irritability; other side-effects include muscle tenderness and weakness, depression, dizziness and birth defects.

Men who have had a heart attack may benefit from statins, yet if cholesterol is considered too high (hyperlipidaemia) it would be more sensible to control it using a herbal agent such as red rice yeast, which is prepared from cooked, non-glutinous white rice fermented by the yeast *Monascus purpureus*. Additionally, herbs such as garlic and melilot may be taken to thin the blood and others such as hawthorn to support healthy heart function. Nutritional supplements may also be advisable, eg Vitamin C which is crucial to the integrity of the arterial walls: deficiency causes the walls to thicken, increasing blood pressure and vulnerability to thrombosis.

For far too long medicine has been wrong about fats in the diet, perpetuating the notion that we should lower our fat intake without distinguishing between normal fats and trans fats in cooked, processed foods, which are certainly undesirable. This faulty dietary advice and the obsessive focus on cholesterol lowering statin drugs toxic to the body is a deadly combination, which has jeopardised the health of entire populations. Nature offers many ways out of this predicament,