

## Low Cholesterol Diet

By Susan Haine

Lower cholesterol may only be a grocery store away.

A recent study reported in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* shows that diet can help lower cholesterol levels as much as using statin (cholesterol lowering) drugs.

According to the University of Toronto study, people who ate a vegetarian diet high in fiber and including cholesterol lowering foods, such as soy, oats and almonds, were able to reduce their cholesterol levels 29 percent. People who maintained a low-fat vegetarian diet, not including these foods, lowered their cholesterol by 8 percent. Those who maintained a low-fat diet and also took statin drugs were able to reduce their cholesterol by 31 percent, just a few percentage points more than the high-fiber diet.

About 109 people in the U.S. die from heart disease every hour, making disease prevention a priority for Americans.

But for many, it may seem too challenging to alter their meat-and-potatoes diets to become tofu-consuming vegetarians. Instead of changing their diets all together, people can at least take a step in the right direction and start eating more heart-friendly foods, such as soy.

According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, soy is one of the many heart-friendly foods that can have many other healthy benefits.

By making simple dietary changes, such as substituting veggie burgers for hamburgers or switching soy-dogs for hot dogs, people can benefit from the advantages of soy, such as lowering cholesterol and body weight.

“This is the best way to include soy in your diet, because it is also a way to get rid of saturate fats,” said Cheryl Rock, a UCSD nutritionist.

In 1999, the Food and Drug Administration approved a health claim which states that consuming 25 grams of soy protein each day, as part of a low-fat diet, can help reduce the risk of heart disease.

But extreme measures don’t have to be taken to increase the soy intake.

“In the U.S. market, we have a considerable amount of soy in our diets we don’t even know about it,” said Rock. “It has been found that there is some amount of soy in products such as processed meats and ice cream, so we don’t always have to work to get it into our diets.”

However, Rock said the amount of soy American’s consume from products such as these is not known. This is because there is not a significant enough amount for it to be accounted for on food labels.

As well, consumers don’t have to give up all of their favorite foods. For example, it is not necessary to give up regular milk and substitute it with soy milk.

“Low-fat milk, itself, may have some cholesterol lowering qualities,” said Rock. “Replacing regular milk with soy milk may not be the best idea because it costs more, it tastes different and it is harder to find.”

Also, soy may not be best for everyone. Rock recommends that women who have had breast cancer or are at a high risk of breast cancer don’t consume more than two to three servings of soy each day. Also, she said it is not necessary to take soy supplements, instead, just get the 25 grams from healthy foods.

“Like everything, you have to take it in moderation,” she said.