

Snacking Your Way to Lower Cholesterol

Recent evidence suggests that eating many small meals each day may help reduce cholesterol levels.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge found that individuals who ate more frequently over-the-course of the day had lower cholesterol levels than those who ate only one or two larger meals. These findings lend support to previous research conducted with animals and humans looking at the effects of *gorging* or *grazing* patterns on cholesterol levels.

In the largest study on the subject, scientists looked at the eating habits of 14,666 middle-aged men and women in Norfolk, England. Food-types and also frequency of eating were collected using a food questionnaire. Total, LDL “bad”, and HDL “good” cholesterol levels were also recorded.

The scientists found that the more often the study participants ate, the lower their total- and LDL-cholesterol dropped. Subjects who ate their food in 6 or more meals per day had an average of 5% lower cholesterol levels than those who ate only once or twice daily.

Cholesterol is obtained through the foods we eat, but also synthesized by the body in the liver. Earlier studies have shown that a “gorging diet pattern” – where animals ate large amounts of food in a single meal – stimulates cholesterol and fat production – which may explain the differences in cholesterol levels seen. Human studies are beginning to demonstrate the same phenomena.

While the best approach to achieving optimal cholesterol levels is still through a healthy, low-fat diet, exercise, and prescription drugs where medically necessary, this study suggests an additional consideration. The researchers recommend individuals consider not only *what* they eat, but also *how often* they eat in managing their cholesterol levels.

Reference:

Titan, SM, Bingham, S, Welch, A, Luben, R, Oakes, S, Day, N, Dhaw, K-T. (2002). Frequency of eating and concentrations of serum cholesterol in the Norfolk population of the European prospective investigation into cancer (EPIC-Norfolk): cross sectional study. *The British Medical Journal*, 323: 1286-1290.