

Soy and Oats To Lower Cholesterol

While evidence mounts on the benefits of both oats and soy on heart health, does the combination of both do even more?

Previous research has shown that consuming both oats and soy can independently reduce cholesterol levels. However, until now, scientists had not evaluated the possible synergistic – or combined – effects of consuming *both soy and oats* in the diet to achieve additional cholesterol-lowering benefits.

Researchers followed 127 women for six-weeks to test the independent and potential combined effects of oats and soy on cholesterol. Study participants were over 50 years, with high cholesterol, and not on hormone replacement therapy or cholesterol-lowering medications.

After all participants consumed a low-fat, low-cholesterol Step 1 Diet* for 3-weeks, the women were randomly selected to follow 1-of-4 diets for six-weeks that included: oats+soy; wheat+soy; oats+milk, or; wheat+milk. They were instructed to consume 2 servings of each item daily.

Scientists discovered a significant reduction in total and LDL (bad) cholesterol (3% and 5%, respectively) for both diets that included oats, but surprisingly they found no additional reductions with soy protein. The researchers hypothesized that the relatively small servings of soy may explain the lack of cholesterol-lowering seen, since other studies with higher intakes have shown benefits.

While a 3% total cholesterol-lowering effect seems small, previous research demonstrates that for every 1% reduction in cholesterol, there's a 2-3% reduced risk of death from heart disease. For this study, the 3% translates to a potential 6-8% decreased risk of mortality. This has significance to the public's health since heart disease is the #1 killer of both men and women.

Soy and oats can be part of a healthy, low-fat diet – both alone and as substitutes for less healthy refined or high-saturated fat options.

*The Step 1 Diet of the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) has been shown to reduce cholesterol in adults with elevated total and LDL-cholesterol. It consists of <30% fat, 8-10% saturated fat, and <300 mg of cholesterol daily, while achieving or maintaining a desirable body weight.

Reference:

American Heart Association. Internet site: www.americanheart.org. (May 2002).

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