

Cholesterol NEWS



June 2015



New trustee to strengthen our reach across all aspects of health care

Welcome to our latest edition of *Cholesterol News*. I am really pleased to announce that we have a new trustee, Tricia Kennerley who is a senior executive of a multinational organisation. She is an experienced pharmacist with a passion for developing the role of the retail pharmacist. She aims to put them at the forefront of giving public health advice to their customers.



JULES PAYNE
Chief executive

heart of the matter

She has experience of working both at a national and an international level. Having a pharmacist among our trustees is a first for HEART UK and I am absolutely delighted to have Tricia on board. It is so important to embrace all aspects of health care across the whole of secondary and primary care.

Those of you who regularly visit our website will have noticed our recent online patient survey. A big thank you to everyone who completed this. The results will help ensure we have a better understanding of the current challenges

facing patients as they move through the healthcare system seeking a diagnosis and ongoing treatment.

We will be using the data from the survey, which is now closed, to increase the general public's and policymakers' awareness of raised cholesterol as a major public health concern.

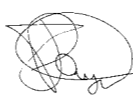
Have you noticed that our magazine, letterhead and our literature have a new fresh look and feel? Staff in the office have been working hard to bring our

communications and literature up to date with a similar look and feel. Jane Kendrick and Linda Main have led the activity and have done a great job while keeping the costs low, so certainly no big invoices for us but instead, a fresh look that is consistent.

You will see on page 11 that we have been working on some new materials too; a lipid clinic pack and a new FH booklet and diet guide. These have been hugely popular already and we have had some great feedback about them.

We have also launched our patient charter. The charter sets out what a patient can expect from their health care professional, but also what the health care professional should expect from their patients – after all it is a partnership. You can read more about this on page 4.

As usual, this edition is packed full of information and I hope you enjoy reading it.



Four key cholesterol issues raised in the HEART UK Manifesto



● Henry Bellingham, MP for North West Norfolk, talks to Jules Payne CEO HEART UK

We briefly introduced our manifesto in the last edition of *Cholesterol News*. The manifesto, which was launched at the Houses of Parliament ahead of the general election, contained four simple requests for government:

1. Commit to see through the implementation of the Cardiovascular Outcomes Strategy.
2. Incentivise and support better management of cardiovascular disease (CVD) at a local level.
3. Develop a national programme for familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH) under NHS England with ring-fenced funding.
4. Implement robust data collection and support access to quality data.

We have had a number of really positive engagement meetings with key opinion leaders to discuss these requests, including eminent MPs and the chief executive of Public Health England. A copy of our manifesto can be downloaded from this link:



● Taking the pledge: Chris Evans MP for Islwyn, Wales

heartuk.org.uk/files/uploads/manifesto.pdf

We plan to build on these discussions to ensure that cholesterol, whether inherited or not, is kept at the forefront of health policy and continues to be recognised as a major risk factor for heart disease.

We are seeing some movement with

additional resources being directed to diagnosing FH within England, which is excellent. But with the NHS under so much pressure there appears to be some apathy that CVD is sorted. We are working hard to put this right!

We have also been planning our

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Patient community: heartuk.org.uk/healthunlocked

twitter.com/heartukcharity

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linkedin.com/company/heart-uk---the-cholesterol-charity

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Our advice for you

If you have any queries, questions or concerns related to heart health, cholesterol, diet or medication, call our **cholesterol helpline** where you can speak to one of our dietetic or nurse advisors, Monday to Friday, 10am – 3pm.

Advice is also available in Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi every Friday. Call **0345 450 5988** or email your question to ask@heartuk.org.uk.

You can also join our online community

group **HealthUnlocked** and chat with others who have an interest in anything from cholesterol issues to heart conditions.

HealthUnlocked now has 3700 members so why not join them today.

To ask questions, share experiences, offer advice and support to others, post your own blogs or generally keep in touch with like minded people, sign up at heartuk.org.uk/healthunlocked

HOPE
FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Please consider a gift in your will to HEART UK helping us to save lives and keep families together longer.

For more information on providing the gift of a lifetime, please contact Charlotte or Charlie on 01628 777046 or email development@heartuk.org.uk

www.heartuk.org.uk/legacy

CONTENTS: CEO's report, this page; campaigning update, p3-4; the Virgin Money London marathon and fundraising, p5-8; ambassador update, p8; the heart-warming story of Rahim, p9; mailbag, p10; martial arts help fight FH, new resources and diary events, p11; the truth about dairy fats and cholesterol, p12



● Taking the test: Mark Durkan MP for Foyle, Northern Ireland

Our gallant runners aim to top £45,000 in this year's marathon

UPDATE

We are so grateful to all our runners who took to the streets on Marathon Day April 26. We are in awe of every single one of them. They demonstrated not only their dedication to training but also their commitment to HEART UK with all the fantastic fundraising they have done.

It was lovely to be able to meet some of the runners to thank them in person at our after-marathon event at Browns Covent Garden, central London.



● Majestic performance: Jules Payne presents a 'Super star' award to Lisa Wright



● Setting up: Tina Dawson, left, and Jane Kendrick get the balloons ready outside our cheer point

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campaigning committee activities for the forthcoming year and have developed some exciting plans – more of this to come in future issues of *Cholesterol News*. All exciting activities, all with the patient at the heart of everything we do.

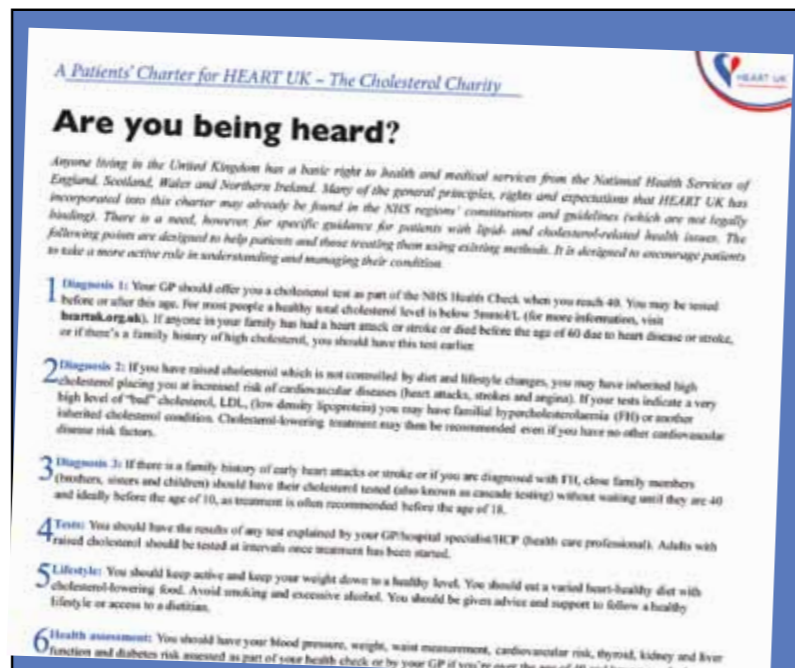
Our patients' charter will let you know what to expect

We hear regularly, via our helpline, that a lot of people don't understand what to expect from their health care professional when they have a problem with cholesterol.

So we set about addressing this situation by creating a patients' charter. The aim was to provide patients with a checklist they can use to discuss cholesterol matters with their health care professional.

Having tested it and incorporated the comments we received, it is now available for your use.

You can download it from our website using the search box or get a copy by emailing ask@heartuk.org.uk. Do let us know if our charter has made a difference to you.



HEART UK launches annual £3000 grant scheme

Research is so important and we have now launched our new grant scheme. HEART UK will be providing a number of annual research grants up to the value of £3,000 each year and for a maximum of three years for any single applicant.

The purpose is to encourage the medical profession, patients and

members of the public to become engaged in small research projects which will help achieve the objectives of the charity.

Applicants are welcome to apply for grants to support relevant scientific or medical research, patient care or treatment, education, training or clinical practice opportunities. For more details, please go to heartuk.org.uk and type "grants" into the search box.

Sponsorship money is still coming in but we hope to raise more than £45,000 from this year's London Marathon. Thank you so much to all our gallant runners and to everyone who supported this key event.

Among our team was Lisa Wright, pictured right, who amazingly has run 14 marathons to date – three London ones for us! For this achievement – Lisa's very last London Marathon – chief executive Jules Payne presented a special 'Super star' award to her for all her commitment to HEART UK. Lisa ran the race again as the Queen of Hearts.

If you want to run the Virgin Money London Marathon 2016 for HEART UK, please visit our website where you can register or email development@heartuk.org.uk – we would love to have you as part of team HEART UK.

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● Steve Thomas at HEART UK's cheer point at the half-way stage near Tower Bridge



● The great HEART UK marathon team: some of our runners and supporters at Browns Covent Garden



● Team work: Charlotte Hoare with some of our magnificent runners



● **Winners one and all:** From left, John Lewis and Paul Harnett who ran and fundraised together; Narendra Dhariwal greets his family at HEART UK's cheer point; Jill Phillips who has raised more than £3,000 to date for HEART UK; Chris Springall and Neil Fraser, the first runner home for Team HEART UK who finished in a great 3 hours 20 minutes. Chris followed hot on his heels at 3 hours 23 minutes.

Help us make National Cholesterol Month bigger and better

October is **National Cholesterol Month**. We want to make it bigger and better than last year's month by reaching more people and telling them about the dangers of high cholesterol and, of course, by raising more funds. So please get involved.

We are delighted to announce that Benecol, who are already one of our established corporate partners, are to sponsor **National Cholesterol Month** this October.

This is a fantastic opportunity to form a partnership with a like-minded cholesterol-lowering brand. Pooling our skills and resources will help us achieve our key aims and objectives for the campaign. We welcome them on board.



Plans are in hand to deliver some really exciting activities for the month – keep an eye on our website (heartuk.org.uk) for further information from us on how you can get involved.

Our main event for **National Cholesterol Month** remains *The Great Cholesterol Challenge*. Due to the success of our 'virtual swim across the Amazon' last year where we raised more than £7,000, we are focusing our energies on even more exciting 'virtual challenges'!

We are teaming up with 222 Sports again for another amazing virtual nine-mile swim – this time dodging the sharks and jelly fish to swim from Sydney Opera House to Bondi beach!

We are also partnering with a

Cyrus cooks up a tasty fundraiser



Some of you may be watching Saturday Kitchen Live and seen talented chef Cyrus Todiwala cooking up some amazing dishes. Cyrus, one of HEART UK's chef ambassadors created a special jalfrezi dish called 'Turkey with a Heart' which was available for a limited period in his London restaurant Café Spice Namaste.

For each dish sold, Cyrus donated £2 to HEART UK and raised £282. We are really grateful to have Cyrus on board; for further information about him and his restaurants visit our website.

cycling charity – **Wheels for Wellbeing** (wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk) with an exciting range of "virtual cycling challenges" – choose from cycling the longest bridge in the world to doing part of the famous Tour de France!

Wheels for Wellbeing are keen to promote key messages around health and wellbeing and can help bring new supporters to



HEART UK so we are very excited about this partnership.

And, Team HEART UK will be out in force as we plan to spend October walking part of the Great Wall of China – "virtually" of course!

Our team of eight will set up an on-line fundraising page, then send the link to all our family and friends and walk at least 400 miles between us during October. We are aiming to raise more than £1,000.

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Team HEART UK puts their best foot forward for the 'walk the Great Wall of China' challenge

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● Follow the example of Michael Crozier, a trustee and chairman of the patients' committee, who did a 'virtual' Walk the Highest Mountains challenge last year and raised more than £600 from family and friends

Could you club together with some work colleagues, family or friends and do the same? Keep an eye on our website for more information about this – or email development@heartuk.org.uk

TAM Asset Management

We are delighted to be working with TAM Asset Management Ltd (TAM) as one of their official charity partners.



TAM has launched an exciting range of socially-responsible investment portfolios under the trading name of TAM Ethical and alongside a new initiative called "You Give, We Give". The innovative scheme allows their clients to donate a percentage of their annual investment gain to a charity of their choice. What's more, TAM will also donate the same percentage of their total annual fees from that client's portfolio to the same charity.

You can invest directly into a TAM Ethical portfolio, under an ISA or a pension. For further information about the scheme please visit tamethical.com

TAM are also doing some amazing fundraising for HEART UK. It kicked



AMBASSADOR UPDATE

An enthusiastic team of people joined in our HEART UK Ambassador Day in Bristol on Saturday May 16.

Delegates, pictured above, included ambassadors, HEART UK staff and trustees and corporate partners. It was a great opportunity to get together, let everyone know about the exciting developments at HEART UK and hear all the amazing things our ambassadors have been doing for us.

Andrew Harrison from our public affairs team at Hanover gave an excellent update on the challenges facing the NHS and the new government and how HEART UK are working to influence public

health policy. This session was really informative, helping our ambassadors to understand better how they could support the charity by telling their own unique stories and experiences.

Ambassadors not only help us raise awareness and funds; they are also our representatives in the community and our patient voice. We provide ongoing support and training to help them flourish.

We are already planning the next ambassador day so if you would like more information about becoming a HEART UK ambassador, please contact Charlie Newton at cn@heartuk.org.uk or call 01628 777046.

off with a London to Paris bike ride on May 7. Not only did they survive the 300 mile trip, they also raised more than £650 for us!

The next HEART UK fundraising event is a 5k challenge in Battersea Park on July 9 where they hope to add to their already impressive total. You can sponsor the TAM team by visiting their on-line fundraising page: [//bit.ly/1liAdYi](http://bit.ly/1liAdYi)

HEART UK cannot accept any liability for the integrity or performance of TAM products.

Amgen and BHR join us to do a marathon 116 cholesterol tests

HEART UK were out in force recently doing some cholesterol testing with staff from Amgen. With the support of BHR, Pharmaceuticals who carried out the tests, we did 116 across two different sites.



These types of events are so important to help raise awareness of the dangers of high cholesterol and our dietetic adviser Linda Main, below, was on hand to offer advice to the staff.

Our ambassador Rahim turned his life around and lost 55kg by adopting healthy habits

When HEART UK ambassador Rahim Patel received some troubling results from a health screening he decided it was time to turn his life around, overhauling his diet and lifestyle to improve his health.

Four years ago Rahim was diagnosed with high cholesterol. He was overweight, suffered from heart palpitations, had high blood pressure and he smoked.

He was also at risk of developing diabetes. Luckily he contacted HEART UK's Cholesterol Helpline and took his first steps towards a healthier lifestyle.

He spoke to Baldeesh Rai, our dietetic advisor, who was able to explain about healthy eating and the importance of exercise and encourage him to change his lifestyle.

Rahim then embarked on his journey to become healthier. He began by making small, manageable changes to his diet which he then built on over the following months.



● BEFORE: Rahim weighed 120kg



● AFTER: Rahim weighs 65kg

Previously he didn't eat vegetables and was unable to play football with his son. He now has a varied diet including lots of vegetables, takes regular exercise and has given up smoking.

Through these lifestyle changes he reduced his weight from 120kg to 65kg. Over time his cholesterol level dropped from 11.4 to 4.3mmol/L, initially he was put on a statin but he is now able

to keep his cholesterol levels healthy by diet and lifestyle alone.

He told us: "You extended my life, enlightening me about healthy eating, teaching me about reading food labels and the right things to eat.

"I cannot describe to you in words how getting healthy has changed my life, and it's all down to HEART UK."

THE conference for medical, scientific, healthcare, student and patient attendees with an interest in cholesterol, atherosclerosis, lipid conditions, cardiovascular disease and nutrition.

Single day or full conference registration options available.

PATIENTS WELCOME

29th Annual Conference
Wednesday 16 - Friday 18 September 2015
De Havilland Campus, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, UK

LIPIDS IN THE COMMUNITY

Learn, update and network

- 2 day conference (Thursday - Friday). One day registration available.
- Allied Health Professional & Primary Care Study Day (Wednesday - am).
- Hyperlipidaemia Education Study Day (Wednesday - pm).
- 200-250 participants covering primary and secondary care, patients and industry.
- Interactive sessions and great networking opportunities.
- Informative plenary sessions given by eminent national and international speakers.

90% of 2014 delegates said they would attend again in 2015.

KEY DEADLINES:

Deadline for abstract submissions:
Monday 15 June

Deadline for Patient and HCP travel grant applications: **Monday 6 July**

Deadline for early bird registrations:
Monday 6 July

www.heartuk.org.uk/conference
Tel: 01543 503 322

HEART UK Registered Charity No. 1003904

Accreditation:
CPD applied for

BDA - educational content endorsed

mailbag

Just how good is coconut oil for you?

Q We hear about the benefits of coconut oil and how good it is for you. Is this true?

A Almost all the fat in coconut oil is saturated so not surprisingly it is solid at room temperature. Most of the saturated fat is in the form of lauric and myristic acids. These are two of the three fatty acids that have been shown to raise blood levels of total and LDL cholesterol.

Just two tablespoons of coconut oil will provide around 24g of saturated fat. Compare that with the maximum saturated fat intake of 20g for women and 30g for men per day.



HEART UK supports official advice from government and international agencies which have carefully reviewed the huge amount of scientific evidence and recommend saturated fat intake should be restricted to no more than 11% of food energy.

Currently 12.6% of our food energy comes from saturated fat in the UK.

We would advise people who want to lower their blood cholesterol levels to avoid using coconut oil in cooking. Creamed and desiccated coconut contain around 60-70% coconut fat and should only be consumed occasionally or in small amounts as part of an overall healthy diet.

For more on saturated fat see page 12 or visit our website.

Q I saw a recent report in a newspaper which said statins (rosuvastatin) can cause diabetes. As I take this statin I am concerned and worried:

A The study you mention was from Finland and claimed that statins, including rosuvastatin, may significantly increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

This study was reviewed by HEART UK's medical, scientific and research team, who found that the results were limited to one particular patient group (white men aged 45 to 73 years old). It was unclear as to whether these findings could apply to women or other ethnic groups.

Some people are at a greater risk of, or predisposed to, developing diabetes whether or not they take a statin. This includes people with a higher than normal blood glucose level, certain ethnic groups and those who are overweight or obese.

A small number of people who take a statin may go on to develop diabetes but people of a similar age, ethnicity and lifestyle who don't take a statin also develop diabetes too.

Blood glucose levels in those who take a statin, particularly those at a high risk, should be carefully monitored to reduce the risk of developing diabetes.

A well-respected large systematic review showed that the rate of developing diabetes was 3% in the group who took a statin versus 2.4% in the placebo group. This small increase in diabetes does not diminish the benefit of statins in reducing cardiovascular disease (CVD).

A large meta-analysis which reviewed more than 170,000 participants clearly demonstrated the benefit for individuals with or without history of CVD who were prescribed statins.

Statins significantly lowered LDL cholesterol and as a result reduced the risk of major cardiovascular events,

You phone or write, our team replies. Our helpline is open Monday-Friday, 10am-3pm The number is : 0345 450 5988 Or you can email your questions to: ask@heartuk.org.uk

including heart attacks and strokes, by more than 20% in a safe and cost effective way.

NICE recently reduced the threshold at which statins could be offered to patients lowering it from 20% risk of developing CVD over 10 years to 10% risk.

At the same time NICE produced a patient decision aid to help individuals make an informed decision when being offered a statin. You can download this from NICE using this link: nice.org.uk/guidance/cg181/resources/cg181-lipid-modification-update-patient-decision-aid2

Q Different doctors seems to use different scoring systems to diagnose FH – what is the difference between these?

A The Simon Broome criteria and Dutch Lipid Clinics Network scoring system are diagnostic criteria used by health care professionals to help them obtain a clinical diagnosis of the inherited high cholesterol condition called familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH).

The Simon Broome criteria is normally used in the UK, it is recommended in the NICE guidelines for diagnosis and treatment of FH. It can give either a possible or definite diagnosis of FH based on which criteria are satisfied. You can read more about this in our FH booklets or online.

The Dutch Lipid Clinics Network score can determine the likelihood of FH using similar criteria to that of Simon Broome. It is often used by specialist lipid clinics to identify those people who should be referred for further investigation or genetic testing for FH.

A higher score increases the chances of having FH. About 40% of people scoring six or more go onto have a positive genetic test for FH, whereas 80% of those that score over 10 have a positive genetic result for FH. To find out more check out the HEART UK website or call our cholesterol Helpline.

Izzy and Lewis fight their way to fitness with martial arts

Isabel (Izzy) Kear, 11, and Lewis Bourne, 14, who have familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH) use martial arts to keep fit and combat their condition.

They were diagnosed when Isabel was 8 and Lewis 12. Mum Kate Kear also has FH. They are all members of Zenku Kai Martial Arts club based in Castleford, West Yorkshire and compete in kickboxing and karate.

They attend classes four times a week doing karate, kickboxing, martial arts fitness, flexibility and strength conditioning classes as well as training for the elite team competition squad.

Isabel and Lewis have both qualified to compete with the World Martial Arts Organisation (WMO) British team at the International Championships in Rugby in October. Isabel won gold in kata (martial arts movements) at the qualifiers in February.

October will be a busy month



● Izzy and Lewis with their WTKA Best of British Medals at the competition held in February

because both children are also eligible for selection to the England squad which will compete in the World

Championships in Spain. There is never a dull moment in the Kear household as the family take part in many exciting events such as a martial arts demonstration at a Cineworld cinema to celebrate the latest Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles film and specialist training with weapons such as sai and bo staffs (weapon sticks).

Sensei (teacher) Tracy Kite from Zenku Kai said: "Martial arts is a great way to have fun and keep fit, we are very proud of Lewis and Isabel's achievements. We understand the importance of exercise in keeping us all healthy and managing cholesterol conditions like FH."

She added: "We will be hosting a fundraising event for HEART UK this summer to raise money to support more children and families with FH."

"We regularly talk to the children in classes about eating a good diet, exercising and how important it is to keep fit and healthy."

New resources now available

Some of you will have noticed that we have produced some smart new resources. We have also re-designed our existing *Diet Guide* and *Understanding Cholesterol* leaflets and added a new *Pictorial FH* booklet.

We are also launching our new lipid leaflet entitled *Blood Fats Explained*, a 16-page guide to cholesterol, triglycerides, lipoproteins, lipid clinics, blood fat conditions and treatments.

We will update you when this is available to order via our *Cholesterol*

e-news, so sign up online to receive your regular copy now from our website home page.

We will also be telling you more about our new lipid clinic packs – available only to lipid clinics and designed to give to newly-diagnosed patients.

Each pack will contain relevant leaflets from our range such as our *Diet Guide*, *Blood Fats Explained* and HEART UK contact card.



Diary dates 2015

June 8-10 – British Cardiovascular Society Annual Conference 2015
Manchester Central Convention Complex
Windmill Street, Manchester M2 3GX
Info: bcs.com

June 10 – 12th North West Diabetes and Cardiovascular Update
Hotel Novotel Manchester West, Worsley Brow,
Worsley, Manchester M28 2YA
Info: heartuk.org.uk/latest-news/article/12th-north-west-diabetes-cardiovascular-update-manchester-2015

September 16-18 – HEART UK 29th Annual Conference
de Havilland Campus, University of Hertfordshire,
Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9EU
Info: wheldonevents@btconnect.com; call 01543 503 322 and see advertisement on page 9.

November 6-7 – *Issues and Answers in Cardiovascular Disease*
New Challenges: Practical Solutions
EMCC, Nottingham
Info: issuesandanswers.org

Further info on the above events at: heartuk.org.uk/news-and-events/meetings-conferences

Truth about dairy fats in food

Recent media reports have suggested that dairy fats may not be as bad as we think resulting in a revival in the popularity of butter and other dairy foods, writes **Linda Main**, our diatetic adviser. Here we set the record straight by taking a long look at dairy fats.

Are full fat dairy foods still off-limits?

About two-thirds of the fat in dairy foods is saturated. Just over half of this is in the form of palmitic acid, a cholesterol-raising saturated fatty acid. Oleic acid (also found in olive oil) is the main unsaturated fat in dairy foods.

While saturated fat can be shown to have a detrimental effect on cholesterol levels and heart health, it is much harder to point the finger at whole foods. Butter of course is mainly fat, but other dairy foods like milk and cheese are more complex and contain a mixture of other nutrients. Recent research has suggested that cheese may not raise LDL cholesterol as much as butter.

One study that supports this was carried out in Copenhagen. Fifty-nine people were asked to replace a proportion of their normal diet with the same amount of energy from either butter or cheese over a six-week period before swapping over (i.e. those who ate butter then ate cheese). Cheese eating resulted in a 5.7% reduction in total and a 6.9% reduction in LDL cholesterol when compared to butter eating.

One explanation may be that the increased intake of calcium in the cheese group results in the formation of "calcium and fatty acids soaps" which are insoluble and can't be absorbed. Similar results have been reported in other studies. Linda Main adds: "Apart from this effect on cholesterol, the protein, calcium and other components in the cheese appear to have a beneficial effect on heart health."

The best practice is still to limit saturated fat. But reduced fat cheese, yoghurt and milk, because of their overall composition, remain an important source of nutrients. If you plan to indulge from time-to-time, a little full fat cheese might not be as bad as we once thought and better than piling on the butter or cream.



Top facts about saturated fats

- Our UK population is still eating too much saturated fat. 12.6% of our food energy comes from saturated fat compared with the recommended maximum of 11% food energy.
- Most foods contain a mixture of saturated and unsaturated fatty acids.
- The main sources of saturated fat in UK diets are dairy foods, meat and meat products and cereal and cereal products.
- Saturated fats have important roles in the body. They only become a

problem when eaten in excess.

- Not all saturated fats raise cholesterol – only three specific fatty acids (lauric, myristic and palmitic acids). These make up about 70% of all the saturated fat in food.
- Studies show that for every 5% of energy from saturated fats that is substituted with polyunsaturated fats (PUFA) there is a 10% reduction in coronary heart disease. This means swapping about 10g of saturated fat with 10g PUFA for the average person.

Why are nutritional studies so hard to interpret?

Evidence to support dietary guidelines comes from a variety of sources but these are not viewed on an equal footing. Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are considered the best but have to be properly designed and need to be large enough and last long enough to give statistically significant results. Meta-analysis and systematic reviews take the evidence further by combining the data from RCT studies. But the results from these can only ever reflect the quality of the data used from RCT's.

Add to this the fact that dietary studies can be skewed on so many levels, after all it is not as simple as talking a pill or a placebo. It is challenging to change one aspect of our diet while keeping all others the same and to do this for long periods of time.

For example in many of the RCTs people were asked to reduce saturated fat

intake but little or no guidance was given as to what the saturated fat should be replaced with. Should it be unsaturated fat, carbohydrate, simple sugars, protein or whole grains? The effects on cholesterol and ultimately heart health are likely to be different. Replacing saturated fat with carbohydrates without any thought to their quality is likely to show little, if any, benefit at all. Such studies only serve to confuse the public when they are widely reported in the press.

So should we take any single dietary study reported in the press seriously? Absolutely not. Ask yourself – does the result reflect the totality of the evidence? How was the study conducted? How many took part and over what period of time? Was the study peer reviewed and published in a good journal? Do the authors have previous experience and expertise in conducting food studies? The answers to these questions all merit further scrutiny.