



New Study: White Meat as Bad for Cholesterol as Red Meat; Plant-Based Diet Best for Health

By Lindsay Morris
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New research challenges a commonly held assumption that those watching their cholesterol should opt for chicken. Consuming high quantities of meat—red or white—can equally raise cholesterol and threaten heart health, according to a study published in June in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

Scientists at Children’s Hospital Oakland Research Institute (CHORI) monitored a group of 113 healthy men and women as they cycled through three different diets: a diet that contained white meat; a diet that contained red meat; and a diet that contained plant-based protein and no meat. Participants spent four weeks on each diet. As an additional test, researchers split participants into two groups, one that ate higher-saturated fat versions of all three diets and one that ate lower-saturated fat three diets, to assess the impact on heart health.

Researchers took samples of blood at the start and end of each cycle and counseled participants on adherence to each diet. Then, the men and women would return to their regular diet for two weeks before shifting into the next phase.

The results debunked a widespread assumption: that white meat, such as chicken and turkey, is better for cholesterol than red, such as beef and pork. In fact, researchers found no difference in the way both meat types raised blood cholesterol levels. Additionally, total cholesterol increases were similar whether participants consumed a diet high or low in saturated fats, although consuming more saturated fat led to a greater rise in LDL, the “bad” cholesterol.

“When we planned this study, we expected red meat to have a more adverse effect on blood cholesterol levels than white meat, but we were surprised that this was not the case—their effects on cholesterol are identical when saturated fat levels are equivalent,” writes the study’s senior author Ronald Krauss, MD, senior scientist and director of Atherosclerosis Research at CHORI.

Not surprisingly, the plant-based diet was found to be healthiest for blood cholesterol. Researchers concluded

that these finds support growing evidence of the [health benefits of eating plant-based](#) over diets heavy in meat.