

Block Cholesterol with Phytosterols

Phytosterols are the group of naturally occurring plant compounds which have two significant health benefits. First of all, phytosterols reduce blood levels of total cholesterol and the "bad" LDL cholesterol. Second, which is particularly good for men, phytosterols can reduce symptoms of benign enlarged prostate. These naturally occurring plant compounds are added to many common cholesterol-reducing foods, but can also be taken as capsules. Even though the word phytosterol may sound a little like steroid, phytosterols do not have any hormonal activity. Phytosterols are known by a large variety of names such as plant sterols, free sterols, and sterol esters. A related group of compounds, which are called stanols, are gathered from trees, not from plants. Phytosterols chemically consist of beta-sitosterol, campesterol, and stigmasterol. The structure of phytosterols is similar to that of cholesterol, but is poorly absorbed. Because of these traits, phytosterols function as cholesterol blockers by reducing the absorption of cholesterol from food and re-absorption of cholesterol from the intestine, which ultimately leads to lower levels of blood fats. Actually, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration now allows companies to claim that phytosterols-containing products are able to lower the risk of heart disease. Phytosterols can also be found in a large variety of plant foods, which includes fruits, vegetables, herbs, nuts, grains, and cooking oils. Additionally, saw palmetto, which is an herb that is commonly used to treat benign prostate enlargement, is rich in phytosterols, especially beta-sitosterol. Many studies have been done that show the abilities of phytosterols supplements to reduce cholesterol levels significantly. One study conducted at East Tennessee State University, researched both sterol esters and placebos on the same group of sixteen people. The results showed a five percent decrease in total cholesterol and four percent decrease in LDL cholesterol after taking a modest dose of sterol esters for four weeks. Additionally, triglyceride levels decreased by nine percent while HDL cholesterol increased by four percent. Another study in which 2.6 grams of phytosterols were taken daily for 12 weeks resulted in a decrease of 3.5 percent in total cholesterol and 5 percent in LDL cholesterol. Due to this, it is suggested that those wishing to supplement in order to improve cholesterol levels should take 1.3 to 3 grams of sterol esters daily. Several other studies have found that supplements of beta-sitosterol can significantly reduce urinary symptoms of benign prostatic hyperplasia, which commonly affects men ages 50 and older. The benefits can be long term to those men who continue taking supplements of about 200 mg of beta-sitosterol three times daily. For those people with moderately elevated cholesterol, phytosterols can be an ideal natural alternative to drugs. Even those people who are already taking cholesterol-lowering drugs can benefit by phytosterols ability to further enhance the benefits of medications. In order to lower cholesterol, it also helps to reduce the intake of hydrogenated vegetable oils and refined sugars and starches, along with increasing physical activity. Dosages between 1.3 and 3 grams daily are likely to reduce cholesterol and LDL-cholesterol levels. The higher dosage is linked to greater reductions in cholesterol. Take phytosterols capsules along with food, for best results.

About the Author

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