**WN Hot stuff: Cholesterol**

**Eggs, bacon, shrimps, back on the menu!**

*Time magazine* covers published in 1984, 1989, and 1999. The cover feature line on the left is ‘Cholesterol. And now the bad news’. On the right the cover line is ‘Cholesterol. The good news’

**The Update team reports:**

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans Committee have now made the mother and father of all nutritional U-turns. Their draft report, now out for consultation, states:

Cholesterol. Previously, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommended that cholesterol intake be limited to no more than 300 mg/day. The 2015 DGAC will not bring forward this recommendation, because available evidence shows no appreciable relationship between consumption of dietary cholesterol and serum cholesterol… Cholesterol is not a nutrient of concern for overconsumption.

This follows the American Heart Association, whose campaign against dietary cholesterol started in 1961 was trashed half a century later in 2013, in a report rating the evidence as ‘insufficient’. ‘Looking back at the literature, we just couldn’t see the kind of science that would support dietary restrictions’ said AHA panel co-chair Robert Eckel of the University of Colorado. Long before, *Time* magazine had set the agenda, as seen in its covers of 1984, then of 1999 and 2014 (above), amplified by a savage on-line blog account of how the cholesterol story began in the 1950s.

Dariush Mozaffarian, dean of the school of nutrition science and policy at Tufts University, says ‘In the general population, there’s really not any strong evidence for a link’. David Katz, director of the Yale prevention research centre, is more forthright. Dietary cholesterol isn’t solidly linked to cholesterol levels in the blood, he says. ‘There’s virtually no association’. Down the decades the science has not changed. Robert Eckel explained that recommended figure of less than or a maximum of 300 milligrams a day is ‘just one of those things that gets carried forward and carried forward even though the evidence is minimal.’
Eight sources of dietary cholesterol. Eggs, liver, fatty fish, butter, shrimps, sausages, meat, cheese: mostly nourishing fresh food. Campaigns against dietary cholesterol have been a public health disaster.

A public health disaster

Half a century ago, dominant scientists in the US decided that because the coronary arteries of people with advanced heart disease contain a lot of blood cholesterol, it is essential to consume less dietary cholesterol. The line was maintained down the decades because the dominant US groups were stubborn, and others said that some foods high in dietary cholesterol are also high in saturated fat, so what did it matter.

Another excuse has been that there is no requirement for dietary cholesterol, so ‘the lower limit is zero’ (WHO, 1990) and ‘it is advisable to keep the intake as low as possible’ (WHO, 2003). Given some common sources of dietary cholesterol, this amounts to saying that there is no requirement for fresh foods like eggs, liver, fatty fish and shellfish, so don’t eat them. This can make nervous consumers scared of all fresh foods other than vegetables, legumes and fruits, which has been bad for the meat, dairy and egg producers, but is very good for transnational manufacturers of oily, sugary or salty ultra-processed products made with ingredients of plant origin. They are licensed to puff their horrible products all over the world as if they are healthy, with big type labels claiming ‘zero cholesterol’.

The evidence on dietary cholesterol has always been flimsy. Yet while stating that the evidence for cardiovascular disease is ‘contradictory’, the 2003 WHO report conclusion was ‘probable’. Eh? More, the report set the goal of less than 300 milligrams a day in the final list of general recommendations for all diet-related chronic diseases, despite the evidence for obesity, and for diabetes, osteoporosis, cancer and dental caries, the other diseases examined, being zilch, nada, zero! The cholesterol position has also been a professional bonanza. Great industries have sprung up to check blood and give drugs. The story of the inflation and collapse of the cholesterol story has discredited nutrition science. The fatwa on dietary cholesterol, although now lifted in the US (subject to consultation) will remain a public health disaster. The memory will linger on throughout the world for decades.

The Update team. Eggs, bacon, shrimps, back on the menu! [Hot stuff: Cholesterol] [Update]. *World Nutrition* April 2015, 6, 4, 249-250