The sweet secret for effectively lowering cholesterol levels Three studies prove sugar cane extract more potent than "statin" drugs

Heart disease has become one of the primary health concerns in this country, and the use of cholesterol-lowering drugs has become almost commonplace. Chances are you or someone you know is taking one. In May of 2001, the National Cholesterol Education program revised its "statin" drug recommendations. Under the new guidelines, the number of people in the United States "qualifying" for prescription drug treatment skyrocketed from 13 million to 36 million. These recommendations also bypass attempts to lower cholesterol by means of diet and exercise and instruct physicians to prescribe first, ask questions later.

While these new guidelines are certainly good for the patent medicine industry, they may not be in the best interest of the millions of people now "required" to take statin drugs. Statin drugs are often associated with side effects such as nausea, headaches, dizziness, sleep disturbances, liver problems, muscle weakness, and pain. One statin drug, Baycol, was recalled by the manufacturer last August after it was found to be linked to over 50 deaths. In addition to these risks, statin drugs carry with them the unpleasant financial fact that the average cost of these medications is over $100 per month.

Since the revised guidelines mean big business for big-name patent medicine companies, it's no wonder that news of the natural alternative to these drugs has remained unknown to the general public.

However, clinical trials of one natural substance show that it offers even better results than prescription drugs at lowering overall cholesterol and triglyceride levels while raising levels of HDL (good) cholesterol and protecting against blood clotting. And it offers all of these benefits with virtually no side effects-at less than half the cost of prescription statin drugs. This amazing substance is a fraction of sugar cane, called policosanol, and it may actually eliminate your need for cholesterol-lowering prescription drugs.

Not all sweeteners are created equal

By now you know that refined sugar is on the "absolutely not if you plan to stay healthy" list. In fact, refined sugar can actually cause a huge list of health problems, including premature tissue stiffening, a process technically (and cleverly) termed "advanced glycosylation endproducts" (AGEs). There's no room for debate: Eliminating refined sugar is a crucial step in living a healthy lifestyle.

However, not all sugar is created equal. Last month, we discussed how certain specific natural sugars can help fight bacteria and infections. Whole sugar cane and other sugar cane fractions can also be good for you. For example, molasses, as the "whole juice" of sugar cane, is a somewhat healthful sweetener, containing useful amounts of iron, chromium, pyridoxine (vitamin B6), and other nutrients that help our bodies metabolize sugar. But the powers of sugar cane go far beyond the nutrients in molasses.

Policosanol is a group of eight to nine "long-chain alcohols" (solid, waxy compounds). Research is accumulating to show that policosanol is more effective than the most "popular" (among mainstream doctors) patent medicines for lowering total cholesterol and triglyceride levels. As added bonuses, policosanol helps to prevent strokes by inhibiting platelet aggregation and abnormal blood clotting and may lower blood pressure. And unlike the popular patent medications, policosanol has virtually no side effects, and does not seriously interfere with our bodies' ability to produce co-enzyme Q10 as the patent statin medications do.
Fighting for heart health: Policosanol outperforms big-name patent medications

Unlike some other supplements (whose claims are supported solely by traditional wisdom or laboratory tests), policosanol has demonstrated its abilities in human trials—trials that compared its performance head to head with top-selling statin drugs. As you will read, policosanol rivaled and even outperformed the statins.

Policosanol vs. Mevacor (lovastatin). In a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study, 53 individuals with type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol were asked to follow a lipid-lowering diet for six weeks. After that, the patients were divided into two groups. One group was given 20 milligrams of Mevacor daily, while the other group was given 10 milligrams of policosanol daily for 12 weeks. While both groups experienced lowered total cholesterol, the policosanol group's LDL cholesterol was dropped 4 percent lower than the Mevacor group. Also, the policosanol group's HDL levels rose nearly 8 percent, compared to a 3 percent drop in the Mevacor group. But the most exciting results occurred in the triglyceride levels. Policosanol caused an 18 percent drop in triglycerides. Mevacor offered only a 0.5 percent drop. (See figure 1 on page 4.)

Policosanol vs. Zocor (simvastatin). In another study, 53 individuals ages 60 to 77 with "primary hypercholesterolemia" (high cholesterol not linked to diabetes or other known metabolic problems) first followed a lipid-lowering diet for six weeks. After that, they were "randomized" to take either 10 milligrams of Zocor or 10 milligrams of policosanol daily for eight weeks. Again, both groups experienced overall lowered cholesterol levels. However, triglyceride levels in the policosanol group were 5 percent lower than those in the Zocor group. (See figure 2 on page 4.)

Policosanol vs. Pravachol (pravastatin). In this trial, 68 individuals ages 60 to 80 with "type 2 hypercholesterolemia" (a very common type) and "high coronary risk" were first asked to follow a low-fat diet for six weeks. After the six weeks, the participants were divided into two groups, one of which took 10 milligrams of policosanol daily, and the other took 10 milligrams of Pravachol daily, both for eight weeks. Policosanol offered better results in all areas, lowering LDL levels 4 percent more than Pravachol, lowering triglycerides 11 percent more, and raising HDL levels 18 percent-13 percent more than Pravachol. (See figure 3 on page 4.)

Policosanol lowers blood pressure; statin drug raises it

High blood pressure is another marker of cardiovascular disease, and, as such, is subject to monitoring and—too often—prescription drug treatment. Fortunately, the benefits of policosanol extend to this arena as well.

In the Mevacor study mentioned above, policosanol lowered blood pressure by what the researchers termed "a mild but significant" degree. Systolic blood pressure (the "upper" number) dropped by approximately 8 points, and diastolic blood pressure (the "lower" number) dropped by approximately 3 points. Both numbers actually went up with Mevacor, the systolic by 2 points and the diastolic by approximately 5 points.

In the Zocor study, the policosanol group showed statistically significant lowered blood pressure levels (an 8 point drop in systolic and a 4 point drop in diastolic). The Zocor group did not show statistically significant results.

A protective powerhouse

The studies summarized above are just a few of many that demonstrate the beneficial effects of policosanol. In head-to-head comparisons with various statin drugs, policosanol does a better job. And not only is policosanol at least as safe as placebo, it appears safer!
Policosanol does not require a prescription and is widely available in natural food stores, compounding pharmacies, and various online sources in 10- and 15-milligram capsule form. Although other strengths are also available, a single 15-milligram capsule daily appears to be enough for most uses.

Please note: If you are already taking a prescription cholesterol medication, you should consult your doctor before making any changes.

Supplement to article

**Policosanol--an equal opportunity cardiovascular aid**

Medical research is frequently criticized for not paying enough attention to metabolic differences between men and women and for focusing much more on men than on women. One research team, however, concentrated exclusively on the female response to policosanol. This randomized, placebo controlled, double-blind study consisted of 244 post-menopausal women. All followed a cholesterol-lowering diet for six weeks, and then divided into two groups. One group was given a placebo for 24 weeks. The other group was given 5 milligrams of policosanol daily for 12 weeks, followed by 10 milligrams daily for the next 12 weeks. The results were dramatic: Policosanol lowered LDL cholesterol by 25 percent and raised HDL cholesterol 29 percent. Total cholesterol levels fell nearly 17 percent in the policosanol group. In the placebo group, LDL, triglyceride, and total cholesterol levels actually went up. (See figure 4 on page 4.)

It's quite apparent that policosanol can make a very significant improvement in serum cholesterol levels for women as well as for men.

**Supplement to article:** Banish blood clots without aspirin

Mainstream physicians, especially mainstream cardiologists, have made a very big deal of the adage "an aspirin a day keeps heart attacks away." What they usually don't make a big deal of is the fact that continuous aspirin use can lead to gastro-intestinal bleeding and accelerate progression toward osteoporosis. Treatment with aspirin has become common because of its positive effects on platelet aggregation. If aggregation is excessive, clots form too easily and the risk of heart attack is higher.

I prefer a more natural approach that avoids the potential side effects of aspirin, and have generally recommended fish oil (1 to 2 tablespoonsful of cod liver oil daily), which makes platelets more "slippery" and less likely to stick together abnormally. Now it appears that policosanol shares fish oil's safe and effective anti-clotting attributes.

The study on policosanol vs. Pravachol referenced on page 2 also examined policosanol's effects on platelet aggregation, or clotting. The researchers used four natural substances to induce clotting in the study participants. They then measured policosanol's effectiveness against each of these substances. Policosanol inhibited aggregation by 16.6 percent, 20.3 percent, 42.2 percent, and 69.5 percent respectively when exposed to the four substances. In considerable contrast, Pravachol actually made clotting worse in the first measure. Even Pravachol's best results, measured in the last test, were still 20 percent lower than those offered by policosanol.

In another comparative trial using healthy volunteers, 20 milligrams of policosanol daily was found to be just as effective as 100 milligrams of aspirin (the daily dose most widely recommended by mainstream physicians). 5

There's no question that a combination of policosanol and cod liver oil is much preferable to aspirin, not only for platelet aggregation inhibition and cholesterol regulation but also for cardiovascular health and health in general.
References:

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