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Books to Salivate Over. EN’s editor dishes on the best reads of 2007 that feature healthful, sustainable eating.  

Comparing Holiday Eggnogs. Calories vary greatly and fat runs the gamut from 0 to 10 grams. Read labels!  

2007 Index. Your essential guide to the stories in EN this past year. Order back issues you missed.  

New Focus on Natural Fiber. Resistant starch gives new cachet to the starchy carbs in beans and cold potatoes.  

Pomegranates Lend Air of Festivity. Crimson clusters worth the effort, rich in antioxidant polyphenols.  

Just In

Obesity Doubles Risk of Colon Cancer in Women

Women who are obese are at significantly greater risk of developing colon cancer than women who are not. In fact, in a recent study of 1,252 women, obesity stood out as the greatest risk factor for colon cancer—more than smoking, age or family history of the disease.

That’s what researchers at Stony Brook University Medical Center in New York found when they studied women who underwent colonoscopies to check for abnormal growths in the colon. They found that women with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or higher (the definition of obese) were almost twice as likely to develop colon cancer as women with BMIs below 30. (A woman who is 5’5” and weighs 180 pounds has a BMI of 30.)

The findings suggest that women who are obese may need to be screened for colon cancer more often or starting at an earlier age. Currently, experts recommend screening starting at age 50.

The Latest International Research Brews Up More Big Benefits For Tea

For centuries, drinking tea, both black and green, was touted as a remedy for a variety of common ailments. Indeed, there is research suggesting that this ancient brew may help fend off several chronic illnesses, including the two biggest killers, heart disease and cancer.

Now, new research presented at the recent Fourth International Scientific Symposium on Tea and Health in Washington, D.C., suggests that compounds in tea can also tame inflammation, improve blood pressure and even protect brain cells. 

Better Blood Vessels. Much tea research has focused on tea’s ability to ward off heart disease, thanks to flavonoids, polyphenol compounds in tea that have powerful antioxidant properties. Flavonoids are found in many fruits and vegetables, but the highest concentration is found in the tea plant, so they are present in black, green, oolong and white teas.

Studies suggest tea flavonoids may lower the risk of cardiovascular disease by reducing inflammation, decreasing total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL, the “bad” cholesterol) levels and protecting against blood clot formation.

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Tame Triglycerides To Help Head Off Heart Disease And Stroke; Here’s How

Chances are you understand how important it is to know your total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) numbers, but elevated triglycerides can be just as risky for your heart. 

EN investigates the latest on triglycerides and provides tips for keeping your blood level within a healthy range.

The Truth About Triglycerides. Unlike cholesterol, which is similar to fat but is actually a sterol, triglycerides are the real deal. They are the form of fat found in the foods you eat and the form created from excess calories and stored as body fat. Usually the body is able to regulate the amount of triglycerides it produces. But sometimes unhealthy levels build up in the blood, raising the possibility of heart attack and stroke, among other health risks.

When Triglycerides Are Trouble. “Any triglyceride number greater than 100 is higher than ideal,” warns Patrick McBride, M.D., M.P.H., of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health and an expert in preventive cardiology. Not everyone agrees you need to aim so low, but the risk of cardiovascular disease clearly increases when triglyceride levels are above 150.

To put a number on the risk, studies show that people with blood triglycerides levels above 200 have a 27% increased risk of stroke, compared to those with lower levels, even after adjusting for other risk factors.

High triglycerides wreak havoc on your health by directly contributing to blocked arteries and triggering abnormalities in blood clotting. High levels may slow blood flow and lead to fewer high-density lipoproteins (HDLs, the “good” cholesterol) and more small, dense low-density lipoproteins (LDLs, the “bad” cholesterol). Experts believe certain LDLs are damaging to artery walls because they oxidize easily, generating harmful free radicals.

But why do triglycerides skyrocket? Elevated levels can be the result of low thyroid, poorly controlled diabetes or kidney problems. They can also be (continued on page 5)
Move More, Weigh Less. It’s no surprise that this dynamic duo lowers triglyceride levels. If you’re overweight, the good news is that any weight loss or increase in physical activity will help. A 10% weight loss has been shown to reduce triglyceride levels by 22%.

Reduce Refined Carbohydrates. Avoid sugar and the ubiquitous sweetener high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS), which can cause triglycerides to skyrocket. In a study of 24 healthy men over six weeks, blood triglycerides rose as much as 32% in those who ate a diet consisting of 17% fructose, compared to no increase in triglycerides in those eating a diet of only 3% fructose. While fruits and vegetables contain fructose naturally, most of the fructose Americans get comes from HFCS.

But it’s not just sugar that’s a problem—any refined carbs are potentially detrimental to your triglyceride levels. That includes bread, crackers and pasta that aren’t whole grain. The increase in blood insulin levels that occurs with a high intake of refined carbohydrates triggers triglyceride production in the liver.

Slash Saturated and Trim Trans. While eating less total fat can aid weight loss and help lower triglycerides, the real fat focus should be on limiting harmful saturated and trans fats. Instead of eating foods rich in saturated and trans fats, eat foods rich in omega-3s (like fish and flaxseed) and monounsaturated fats (as in nuts and canola and olive oils), rather than simply cutting total fat intake.

Opt For Omega-3s. Numerous studies suggest that omega-3 fatty acids can significantly lower triglyceride levels. In one study, from Kaiser Permanente in Colorado, people already diagnosed with cardiovascular disease who had triglycerides greater than 200 experienced reductions in triglycerides when they supplemented with omega-3s, either as a combination of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) plus eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) or as DHA alone.

Noteworthy in this study were the relatively modest daily doses that showed benefits—slightly less than the amount of omega-3s in just one three-ounce portion of salmon. Triglycerides dropped about 22% in the group taking 1,000 milligrams of DHA for eight weeks and 18% in the group taking 1,252 milligrams of combined DHA plus EPA.

Another study saw slightly greater triglyceride reductions in even less time (45 days) when people were given more omega-3s than typically found in a single serving of fish (about three grams DHA a day). In fact, for people with very high triglyceride levels, the American Heart Association recommends two to four grams of DHA plus EPA a day, under a doctor’s supervision. Unless you’re a serious fan of fish, this requires supplements.

After Alcohol? While moderate alcohol intake—one drink a day for women, two for men—has been linked to lower risk of heart disease and stroke, for some people it may cause triglycerides to soar. Alcohol is most problematic for those with extremely high triglyceride levels of 500 or greater. Moderate consumption is fine for most people.

EN’s Advice. Check out “6 Ways to Help Rein In Triglycerides,” for details on what to do to keep your triglycerides in check. If these measures don’t work or if your triglyceride level is very high, your doctor may prescribe a prescription drug, such as high-dose niacin or a drug that combines a statin with niacin (e.g., Advicor).

—Linda Antinoro, J.D., R.D.
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