Cholesterol is a major concern for coronary heart disease, and statins are the fastest growing drug class despite evidence these prescription drugs may do little for most of the people taking them. Here is some good news about a natural cholesterol reducer. ▷

Martin Stone, ClH
Numerous studies have reported the efficacy of sterols and their various esters in cholesterol reduction.

Sterols, or phytosterols, are naturally occurring components of plant membranes found in many fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, cereals, legumes, vegetable oils, and other plant sources. These constituents act in plants much the same way as cholesterol acts in animals and humans.

HEART HEALTH
Plant sterols have been studied since the 1950s for their cholesterol-reducing capacities. As they are similar in structure to cholesterol, it is surmised that sterols are able to take the place of cholesterol, preventing it from being absorbed into the intestines from the bloodstream.

The displaced cholesterol can then be excreted from the body with the result that food-borne cholesterol and, more importantly, cholesterol manufactured in the liver are both reduced.

Numerous studies have reported the efficacy of sterols and their various esters in cholesterol reduction with up to 15 percent reduction in total cholesterol and LDL (low density lipid, or bad cholesterol).

In fact the FDA has approved health claims about how foods containing plant sterol esters may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease by reducing blood cholesterol levels when they are part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol.

Plant sterols may also have an ability to improve the effectiveness of statin drugs. One study reported that the effect of statins on cholesterol reduction doubled with the simultaneous use of sterol-containing margarine.

PROSTATE HEALTH
A specific sterol called beta-sitosterol has been studied for its therapeutic benefits in men with benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). This condition commonly affects men in middle age, causing a painful swelling of the prostate.

Beta-sitosterol binds to prostate tissue and affects the metabolism of prostaglandins, substances found in the body that affect pain and inflammation. Short-term studies have indicated that beta-sitosterol is an effective alternative in the treatment of BPH. And a follow-up study found that these benefits lasted even after use of beta-sitosterol had been stopped for one year.

Whether it’s for prostate support or cholesterol control, or both, these natural plant components hold great promise for improved health.

Martin Stone, CIH, has been involved in the complementary health field in several capacities including clinician, teacher, and author. He has written 16 books on alternative health subjects.