On Statins, Cholesterol and the Like

I put together a page of information for a friend who has furred arteries and whose doctor wanted to put them on statins. Since we have had experience in our family of the harm that statins can do, I put together a page of information for my friend, and then thought that others might find it useful, so decided to post it here.

Usual warning: I’m not a doctor nor nutritionist nor qualified in any way, other than having hung around this world for the last 64 and a bit years with my eyes and ears open!

If this stuff interests/concerns you, I suggest you go buy copies of the books listed here and lend them to your doctor! And if your doctor won’t read them, there’s a list of “low-carb doctors” on Jimmy Moore’s blog.

Statins and your Brain

First, there is currently a lot of concern that doctors the world over seem to be handing out statins like candy. Many people believe that they do little or no good and may well do harm, in particular causing “cognitive impairment”. One of the leading voices in this area is Dr Duane Graveline: (http://spacedoc.com), a doctor and retired NASA Astronaut. He became interested in statins when he started to experience Transient Global Amnesia. He has written four books:

- Statin Drugs Side Effects and the Misguided War on Cholesterol
- Lipitor Thief of Memory
- The Statin Damage Crisis
- The Dark Side of Statins

The Cholesterol Controversy

Chris Masterjohn is a PhD nutritionist and maintains a blog www.cholesterol-and-health.com. These are just a few of the articles on his blog that I found interesting:

- Statins Fry Your Brain and Scramble Your Memory Like an Egg – a review of Duane Graveline’s work.
- Learning, Your Memory, and Cholesterol
- High Cholesterol And Heart Disease — Myth or Truth? (Includes stuff about pattern A and pattern B — see below)
- HDL / LDL Good? Bad? Ugly?

Most people seem to have got the message that High Density Lipoprotein Cholesterol (HDL-C) is good and Low Density Lipoprotein Cholesterol (LDL-C) is bad. But there seems to be more to it than that because LDL-C comes in different sizes: no “one-size-fits-all” for cholesterol!

Here’s a very quick summary:

- there’s LDL-C Pattern A (think A-OK) which may or may not be good for you, but it certainly isn’t bad. The particles are large and fluffy.
- then there’s LDL-C Pattern B (“B” for Bad) where the particles are small and hard (think Bullets or Ball Bearings). Those small particles burrow into your artery walls, I am told, and cause serious plumbing problems.

Pattern A comes from eating Animals, hence the messages we have had about saturated fat may have been misleading, and Pattern B comes from excess carBohydrates, and so the messages about eating healthy carbs may have been way beyond misleading. That’s it in a nutshell, but if you have a hankering for more detailed academic words, here is an article on effects of low-carb diet on LDL particle size:

Effect of a low-carbohydrate, ketogenic diet program compared to a low-fat diet on fasting lipoprotein subclasses

Will a Low-Carb Diet Wreck or Refurbish Your Metabolism?

I’m betting my life, at the moment, that the answer is “refurbish”. If you’d like to explore that in depth, here’s an...
article from the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition: *Low-carbohydrate nutrition and metabolism*. This almost definitely contains more information than you will ever want or need, but if you have any questions about the science behind all this stuff, that’s probably where you’ll find the answers!

**Do We Need Carbs in our Diet?**

There is much frustration amongst doctors in the low-carb camp with those who say that carbohydrates are a required macro nutrient, and we need a lot of them.

No they are not, and there’s a lot of backward reasoning used to support the “we need carbs” hypothesis that goes something like this.

Type 1 diabetics can suffer from something called keto-acidosis. In fact people with very serious long-term type 2 diabetes (and who are not taking their medication) can also get into keto-acidosis. It’s not a nice thing and needs immediate attention. It is characterised by having extraordinarily high levels of ketones in the blood. Having much lower levels of ketones in the blood is called ketosis, and isn’t dangerous. In fact many people would regard it as desirable state and work quite hard to get there and stay there (“nutritional ketosis” that state is called).

To give a parallel case, there is one class of macro-nutrient that most medical people and nutritionists would not regard as a macro-nutrient, and that’s alcohol. But I have seen “macro nutrient” defined as something that your body can burn to produce energy, and alcohol is quite energy dense; about the same as fat, I am told. We all know that one can have different levels of alcohol in the blood, and that will have different effects, from the single glass of wine with dinner that may just serve to relax you up to the bottle of vodka that will probably land you either in hospital or jail, depending on what you are doing having drunk the vodka.

The nutritionists would concede that point and say that the reason they would not count alcohol as a macro-nutrient is that we can live perfectly well without it if we never touch a drop in our entire lives.

The same is true of carbohydrates! The powers that be in the USA define the minimum daily requirement for carbohydrates as 150 grams, on the basis that this amount will stop you going into ketosis and ketosis is bad. But ketosis ISN’T bad! It’s keto-acidosis that’s bad. Well, they would say, humans can’t exist without eating carbs, and this is the point at which we introduce the Inuit paradox into the conversation.

*The Inuit Paradox: How can people who gorge on fat and rarely see a vegetable be healthier than we are?*¹ I found this article in Discover magazine.

Oh, and, it is increasingly recognised that our brains run better on ketones than carbs. I have experienced this myself, but here’s an article by Massachusetts psychiatrist Emily Deans⁴ that explains the advantages of running our brains on high-octane ketones as opposed to low-octane glucose.

PS: I had finished this page and sent it off to the editor for review and was getting ready to shut down for the night, when I came across an e-mail telling me that these people were following me on Twitter. So I couldn’t resist adding this page: Putting The Myth To Rest: There Is No Such Thing As Bad Cholesterol⁵.

To see the (complete) original of this post, go to: [http://www.livefreefromobesity.co.uk/on-statins-cholesterol-and-the-like/](http://www.livefreefromobesity.co.uk/on-statins-cholesterol-and-the-like/)

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² [http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/86/2/276.full]
³ [http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evolutionary-psychiatry/201104/your-brain-ketones]
⁴ [http://coconutoil.com/putting-the-myth-to-rest-there-is-no-such-thing-as-bad-cholesterol/]