

executive health

the report that briefs you on what to watch

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Mark D. Altschule, M.D.:

IS IT TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT CHOLESTEROL?

Do so many of our favorite foods, such as eggs, that contain cholesterol increase your risk of heart disease? Or are those TV ads for "substitute" foods that loudly proclaim "No cholesterol, no animal fat" a lot of pseudo-scientific nonsense?

The diet-cholesterol hypothesis has been around for many years but never before in its long history have so many people known about it. Today an awesome collection of powerful agencies, public and private, put forward statements that assert or imply its truth. These agencies are mostly American, the Medical Research Council of Great Britain, for example, having expressed differing views.

One of the useful consequences of any theory, right or wrong, is that it stimulates study. The purpose of such study may be to prove the favored hypothesis by acquiring more data, or more convincing data, that tests the hypothesis, regardless of the outcome.

The diet-cholesterol hypothesis has stimulated a host of studies. What do the results tell us?

The Honolulu Heart Study . . .

A new report by Dr. G. E. Rhoads and his col-

leagues of the Honolulu Heart Study, National Heart and Lung Institute, particularly invites analysis⁽¹⁾. These physicians studied the incidence of coronary heart disease in relation not only to the total serum (blood) cholesterol level *but also in relation to what the cholesterol was attached to*. They separated the blood cholesterol into two fractions, alpha and beta. They found that although the incidence of coronary heart disease and the amount of beta cholesterol in the blood were parallel, the frequency of coronary heart disease was *opposite* to the amount of alpha cholesterol. The more alpha cholesterol the patients had in their blood, the less likely they were to have coronary heart disease. In other words, if you assume that the blood cholesterol level is important in causing heart disease, then you must assume that cholesterol attached to small

(1) Rhoads, G. G., Gulbrandsen, C. L., and Kagan, A. Serum lipoproteins and coronary heart disease in a population study of Hawaiian Japanese men. *New Eng. J. Med.* 294:293, 1976.

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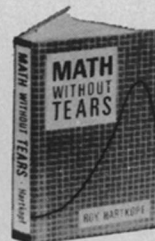
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