

It's inflammation, stupid

One of America's leading heart groups made such a momentous statement recently that, quite naturally, the world's media has utterly ignored it. The American College of Cardiology (ACC), which influences heart disease therapy, has pronounced that cardiovascular disease (CVD) has less to do with 'bad' cholesterol, and more to do with inflammation.

The announcement – sent out to American cardiologists – implies that the 'blocked pipe' theory of CVD that launched the multi-billion-dollar statins and low-fats industries has been going down a false trail. The theory, which has dominated heart therapy since around 1950, is based on the observation that a heart attack happens when the heart is starved of oxygen because LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol has closed the artery and stopped the flow of blood.

But why does LDL collect around arteries in the first place? According to the theory, it's because we are eating too many fats, an idea promoted by American physiologist Ancel Keys in the 1980s. Replace saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats—found in fish, nuts, seeds, and plant oils—and we'd see a decline in heart disease.

It didn't make any difference, and nor did the introduction of cholesterol-lowering statins, the world's most prescribed family of drugs. Heart disease was, and is today, still the biggest killer – and it's the biggest killer of women, too, despite the focus on breast cancer.

So, what did we get wrong (aside from everything)? There's a major clue when we look at heart attacks in women: nearly half have clear and healthy arteries. The same is true for a smaller proportion of men: 30 percent of them don't have blocked arteries. Cardiologists have known about this for years and they even have a name for these cases: MINOCAs (Myocardial Infarction with Non-Obstructive Coronary Arteries).

Not that they tell the patient. Cardiologists and health agencies still promote statins and a low-fat diet when the reality is that blocked arteries are a downstream response to inflammation. Inflammation – brought on by stress, a high-sugar diet and insulin insensitivity, amongst others – damages arteries and the endothelium, the small cells that line arteries, and LDL cholesterol is the repair agent that tries to heal the wounds.

The greater the inflammation, the greater the damage to the arteries, the greater the accumulation of LDL around the artery wall.

In its statement, the ACC states: "There is now compelling evidence of adverse CVD (cardiovascular disease) outcomes in the setting of elevated markers of

inflammation and that targeting inflammation significantly reduces recurrent CVD events.” So, stop pushing the pills and instead promote anti-inflammatory lifestyle strategies.

Will this stop the wholesale prescribing of statins – recommended to everyone over the age of 50 – in its tracks? Of course not, even though the drugs cause a range of side effects, from muscle weakness, kidney failure and, ultimately, death.

There’s far too much money tied up in statins, and as we all know, profits precede health for Big Pharma

Stay safe and sane.

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