

CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE

Low HDL Cholesterol = High CAD Risk; Researchers Urge Guidelines Change

DALLAS, TEX—Low levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol in men with coronary artery disease (CAD) are predictors of an increased incidence of coronary events, even when the total cholesterol level is in a desirable, safe range. These findings suggest a more intensive approach be taken to identify and raise low HDL as an important part of a secondary prevention program, regardless of total cholesterol levels.

An earlier study with similar findings had recommended that the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) guidelines be changed to include routine screening of HDL for all coronary artery disease patients, said Dr. Michael Miller here at the 63rd Annual Sessions of the American Heart Association. The NCEP panel, however, has not changed its position, stating that increased risk for future coronary events had not been definitively established in CAD patients with isolated HDL levels. Dr. Miller is a cardiologist at

the Clayton Heart Center of The Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, MD.

To address this problem, Dr. Miller continued, a subset of 740 persons initially undergoing diagnostic coronary angiography at Hopkins were followed for 12 years. Men with both desirable total cholesterol (<200 mg/dl) and angiographically proven CAD were evaluated for subsequent events including coronary death, myocardial infarction or premature closure of coronary artery bypass grafts. Complete follow-up information was obtained in 77 males.

Forty-four of these 77 men had new coronary events, Dr. Miller said. While there were no differences in age, total cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein cholesterol or triglycerides, there were significantly lower levels of HDL in this group that had new

events. Furthermore, 74% of patients with HDL levels <35 mg/dl had new coronary events compared with only 30% with HDL levels ≥35 mg/dl, a highly significant difference (P=0.0005).

"Approximately five million people in the U.S. have coronary disease," Dr. Miller declared. "We estimate that nearly 750,000 have desirable levels of total cholesterol but are deficient in HDL. Based on the important new findings from out of the study, it appears that many of these subjects are at very high risk for further coronary events, including coronary death."

3

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