Ask Leyla: Is coconut oil raising my cholesterol?

Q: My doctor tells me my cholesterol is too high. I'm a 69-year-old active woman with a total cholesterol of 314. I've incorporated virgin coconut oil into my daily diet, and I'm certain that's what raised all my numbers. Should I be worried? Here's the rest of my lipid panel:

LDL: 169
HDL: 134
Triglycerides: 55

A: Coconut oil is one of the most saturated fats on the planet, but because most of the fats contained are medium chain triglycerides (MCTs), they're a source of quick energy and are preferentially burned as fat, *rarely* raising LDL levels.

Saturated fats such as the medium chain triglycerides (MCT) serve very important functions in human health. Coconut oil is a major source of MCTs such as lauric, caprylic and capric acids, which are used primarily for energy and are quite effective in fat loss. Lauric acid in particular possesses special antimicrobial properties (antiviral, antibacterial and anti-protozoal), is present in human milk, and critical in infant nutrition. However, it has been shown in the scientific literature to raise HDL levels, which may explain why yours is so high.

A total cholesterol of 314 is less important than the breakdown. Yes, you have a high LDL, but what is your particle size? Is it mostly Pattern A (desirable) or Pattern B (more atherogenic)? This can be found out through a VAPS test or NMR test that your doctor can order for you. The same tests can also clarify what types of HDL particles you have. With regard to your triglycerides, they are absolutely gorgeous at a level of 55.

Another important test is to determine if your cholesterol is being oxidized. Oxidized LDL is an important risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

If you want further reassurance about your risk factors for cardiovascular disease, request an EBT heart scan from your doctor. This will show if there are any calcifications present, and to what degree, in your coronary arteries.

Please remember that dietary saturated fats aren't associated with cardiovascular disease. This notion has been debunked by science. Coconut oil is a functional food providing high quality fats important for weight loss, cardiovascular health and neurological conditions such as Alzheimer's disease.

To your health!