

[IMAGE]

A Portfolio You Can Be Proud Of

It seems as if there's a new fad diet on the market every week. The latest one to make the headlines is the "Portfolio" diet, which is high in plant sterols, viscous fiber, almonds, beans and soy protein, and is designed to cut the amount of cholesterol in the blood. A recent study has shown that the Portfolio diet works as well as some cholesterol-lowering drugs, and without causing unwanted side-effects.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, involved 46 people with high cholesterol, and compared the effectiveness three diets: 16 people used the National Cholesterol Education Program's Step 2 diet, a low-saturated fat diet that emphasizes whole-wheat cereals and low-fat dairy foods; 14 took the Step 2 diet, along with a daily, 20-milligram dose of the cholesterol drug lovastatin; and the remaining 16 followed the Portfolio diet. The patients remained on their respective diets for one month; fasting blood samples, blood pressure and body weight were measured at the start of the study and at two- and four-week intervals.

Patients in all three groups lost similar amounts of weight, and there were no significant differences in blood pressure. When it came time to measure blood cholesterol, however, patients in the lovastatin and Portfolio groups had significant reductions in LDL, or "bad," cholesterol levels. LDL levels dropped 31 percent in the lovastatin patients and 29 percent in the Portfolio patients. The control group, on the other hand, reported only an 8-percent reduction in LDL levels.

Before you write off the Portfolio diet as too strict for your taste, bear in mind that a wide variety of foods fit into the diet's plan. In addition to the foods mentioned above, okra; legumes; tofu; soluble fiber; and meatless "chicken" and "hamburger" patties were acceptable options for subjects in the Portfolio group. Other foods that can be eaten as part of the Portfolio plan include oat bran; most fruits; tomatoes; vegetarian chili and/or curry; eggplant; cauliflower; onions; and red peppers.

Reference:

Jenkins D, Kendall C, Marchie A, et al. Effects of a dietary portfolio of cholesterol-lowering foods vs. lovastatin on serum lipids and C-reactive protein. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, July 23, 2003: Volume 290, pp.502-510.

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