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# Introduction

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Ever get the feeling there's a whole lot more to the cholesterol story than we've been told? For years, popular wisdom has held that having elevated levels of cholesterol in your blood is extremely dangerous, leading to heart attack, stroke, even death. Therefore, it must be lowered by any means necessary. Those means include cutting saturated fat and cholesterol from your diet and taking cholesterol-lowering prescription drugs. Sound familiar? Well, some of us took the time to stop and ask a few simple questions: Isn't the human body a lot more complex than this simplistic solution implies? Isn't our health dependent on more than one single marker, like total cholesterol? And how and why did cholesterol become the villain? My name is Jimmy Moore and these are the big questions that I will answer for you in this book.

In the midst of writing *Cholesterol Clarity*, I paid a visit to my local Sam's Club, which offers its customers some free, basic health tests a few times a year. This is always an eye-opening experience for me, but not for the reasons you might think. I've been a keen observer of my health for the past decade, and in that time I've become fascinated by what is commonly defined by our culture as "healthy." The perfect example: my visit to Sam's Club.

I was there to get my total cholesterol and other health markers checked since they were offering these tests for free. As I was waiting in line, I happened to overhear the results for the young woman in front of me. She had a body-fat percentage of 39.7, which is considered very high ("normal" for a woman is 25–35 percent), as well as incredibly high blood pressure—something like 180/120 (healthy blood pressure is 120/80). But when her fasting blood sugar came back at 85 (in the 80s is ideal) and total cholesterol at 140 (anything under 200 is considered a "healthy" level), the nurse cheerfully

exclaimed, “Wow! You are so healthy. Your cholesterol is under 200.” The young woman said she had naturally low cholesterol, to which the nurse enthusiastically replied, “Yes, the less of that stuff [cholesterol] you have in your body, the better.” All I could think was O...M...G!

Then it was my turn. The nurse and I chatted as I waited for my own blood work results. She commented on how healthy and vibrant I looked, and predicted that my numbers would be great. But all her enthusiasm quickly vanished, however, the moment the shocking results popped up on her screen. My total cholesterol came in at 322—widely considered exceedingly high by mainstream medical standards. She looked like someone whose dog had just been hit by a truck. Her tone became hushed and she nervously asked: “A-a-are you feeling okay?” I told her that I felt fantastic. But I don’t think she believed me. She then asked what I was doing about my cholesterol problem. I explained to her that I wasn’t worried about my cholesterol. “Oh, but you must take a medication to bring those unhealthy levels down,” she responded. I told her that, in my opinion, cholesterol-lowering medications like statins are more harmful than helpful. After a few seconds of awkward silence, she nervously wished me well and sent me on my merry way, probably figuring I’d drop dead in the parking lot.

## **Health Has Been Reduced to a Numbers Game**

My Sam’s Club scenario is, unfortunately, not all that uncommon. When it comes to the medical profession, *high cholesterol* automatically means “poor health.” And yet, one minute that nurse was telling me how great I looked; the next, after my numbers came in, she was assuming the worst. It’s reactions like hers that prompted me to write this book, to help educate not only everyday people like you and me, but even those in the health profession who insist on promoting decades-old fallacies about cholesterol.

We live in the most technologically advanced period in history, with instant access to information on virtually any topic, including health. Type a keyword into a search engine like Bing or Google, and you’ll get links to multiple sites purporting to know the answer to your question. It’s a wealth of advice at your fingertips. But there’s a big downside to “Dr. Google”: the question of reliability. Who are the sources of the information? Can you

trust them? Are they biased in any way? Is the information based on solid scientific evidence? These are critical questions when the subject is your health.

There's a lot of information about cholesterol out there—online, in magazines and newspapers, on TV—and all from so-called “experts.” Most of it is contradictory or confusing or even outright false. How can you make informed decisions about what your own cholesterol test results mean if the messages are mixed? My hope is that this book will lift the clouds from your own good judgment, so that you, too, can begin to take control of your own health.

## **Who Is Jimmy Moore and Why Did He Decide to Write This Book?**

In January 2004, my health was in shambles. I was thirty-two years old and my weight had ballooned up to 410 pounds; I was wearing 5XL shirts and sixty-two-inch-waist pants, and even those seemed to rip every time I sat down. I was dependent on three prescription medications—for breathing issues, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. I had already watched my older brother Kevin struggle with morbid obesity; he lived through a horrifying series of heart attacks in 1999 when he was thirty-two. (Kevin eventually died from heart disease, diabetes, and obesity in 2008, at the age of forty-one.) Given all that happened to my brother, it's probably no surprise that I was motivated to do something about my own weight and health issues. I've learned a lot since then, and this book is my way of sharing some of that knowledge with those who have been misled.

I'll get into more specifics about my weight loss and health transformation story in my next book, *Keto Clarity*. But, briefly, I went on to lose 180 pounds in 2004 and weaned myself off the three “health-managing” drugs prescribed by my doctor. After just a few months of weight loss, the wheezing stopped; in less than six months my blood pressure was normal; after nine months, my cholesterol was low enough that I could come off the statin drugs. It was, both literally and philosophically, a transformative experience to say the least.

In 2005, I started writing a blog called *Living La Vida Low-Carb*. My intention was to educate, encourage, and inspire anyone else who might be

dealing with a severe weight problem and the predictable health problems that come with it. My personal education skyrocketed a year later, when I became the host of the iTunes podcast *The Livin' La Vida Low-Carb Show with Jimmy Moore*. Through this top-rated Internet health radio show I have interviewed hundreds of the biggest names in the world of nutrition, medicine, research, and more. My natural curiosity and desire to soak up every bit of health-related information I came across made up for my lack of experience as a broadcaster and interviewer. All these years later, I still have that intense determination to keep on learning and sharing that information with the world.

At this point I have seven-hundred-plus episodes of that podcast under my belt, and many of the experts I've interviewed I now consider friends. In 2012, I added a second podcast, *Ask the Low-Carb Experts*, that allows listeners to pose questions to guests specializing in a specific health topic. The curiosity of the general public about healthy living is definitely growing. It's clear that a lot of my listeners are frustrated by the often ineffective and sometimes blatantly (perhaps even deliberately) wrong or incomplete information they are receiving. They are desperate for the truth because it's their health at stake. My goal with my podcasts is to provide people with information that is accurate, up-to-date, and easy to understand, thus empowering them to become smarter patients.

## **Most Health Information Is Biased and Confusing**

When it comes to health and medicine, the science is continually changing. If you are an informed and enlightened doctor or patient, the learning really never stops. But it can be hard to get at the truth. The pharmaceutical companies that fund research have a vested interest in certain results, so conclusions may be based on data that supports a preconceived hypothesis. And studies are often rushed, biased, or flawed—yes, sometimes even the research your doctor is basing his treatment of your health on. Furthermore, it often takes many years for the results of a study to make it to your doctor's office, so that the “latest research” your doctor is giving you may already be out of date.

Most of us get our science and health information in bits and pieces, primarily through the media. Unfortunately, one of the primary jobs of TV, radio, major newspapers, and magazines is to make money. To do that these media outlets need to generate viewers and readers by grabbing your attention; unfortunately, that often prompts them to sensationalize data and misrepresent what the research is actually saying. Therefore, it is not unusual for, say, a TV anchor or reporter to misinterpret or skew a study simply to give the story a more interesting or newsworthy angle. This makes trying to stay healthy both challenging and frustrating. How can the average Joe or Jane parse the good from the bad, the true from the false? I'm hoping this book will help when it comes to the subject of cholesterol.

Sometimes I wonder if the chaotic nature of health reporting is a deliberate tactic: Keep people utterly confused and they will simply give up trying to figure it out and just stick with the conventional wisdom we all believe is true. For example, what's the harm in taking a cholesterol-lowering medication like Lipitor or Crestor as a precaution against a heart attack? Tens of millions of other people are already opting for these "safety nets," so why not join the crowd? Here's one good reason why you shouldn't become another mindless lemming: You might not need it and it may actually be harmful to you.

Right about now some of you may be thinking, *My doctor says I have "high cholesterol" or hypercholesterolemia* (that's just a fancy term for high total and LDL cholesterol). *He says that puts me at an increased risk of developing heart disease. You don't know me, Jimmy Moore, so why should I listen to you?*

I might not know you, but I do know this: A January 2009 study published in the *American Heart Journal* found that nearly three out of four patients hospitalized for a heart attack had total cholesterol levels in the "normal" range of 200 or less. Some of them were taking statins to lower their cholesterol, and some of them had naturally low cholesterol. In other words, the statins weren't preventing heart attacks from happening, and neither was low cholesterol. As much as people would like to believe that there is some "magic pill" to address all their health concerns, especially the way statin drugs are marketed as good for your heart health, nothing like that exists. Add to that the detrimental side effects caused by "cholesterol-lowering" medications like statin drugs and you have a very troubling situation. In chapter 5, I will delve into some of the downsides of statin

drugs, as well as when they should and should not be used. For now, suffice it to say that statins have some pretty serious and common side effects, including joint and muscle pain, decreased strength, and memory loss. Many people taking statins are fifty years old or older, so they might write off those symptoms as simply part of the aging process. But emerging information tells us otherwise: The very medication that is supposed to enhance and lengthen our lives may be doing just the opposite.

Drug companies won't tell you the truth about cholesterol. They are making a fortune on statins to the tune of tens of billions of dollars annually. So who will tell you the truth? And, more importantly, how can we live heart-healthy and drug-free lives?

## **Start by Cutting through the Misinformation**

If you like straight talk that cuts through the muckity muck, you've come to the right place. The title of this book is *Cholesterol Clarity* for a reason: The intention is to make the truth about cholesterol absolutely clear. This book is not for medical geeks. It's not filled with complex terminology and jargon that makes the layperson's eyes glaze over. There are, for sure, a few technical terms you need to know, but we've provided a convenient glossary of terms in the back of the book that will explain everything for you in a language you can understand. In addition to examining the current recommendations for cholesterol levels and why they may not be valid, we will provide a practical guide to all the major cholesterol numbers, their ideal ranges (which are likely much different from what you have been told), and what specific actions in your diet and lifestyle you can take to address any troubling areas in your cholesterol profile.

The information in this book could very well be shocking and controversial, both to you *and* your doctor. The companies making money off drugs that treat high cholesterol have orchestrated a brilliant propaganda campaign. I think it's time we lifted the veil of deceit and shone a bright light on the truth.

## What Makes Jimmy Moore a Cholesterol Expert?

Excellent question! Since I am merely an educated and empowered layperson with no formal training in medicine, nutrition, or any other health-related field, I expect you to question my authority to share information with you about your health. And I'm sure it doesn't help that I have just revealed that my own cholesterol levels are considered unhealthy by most medical standards. (See the 'additional resources' for my cholesterol test results from 2008 to 2013.) Additionally, I wouldn't be surprised if, based on those levels, you assume that I haven't done my homework or I don't know what I'm talking about when it comes to cholesterol. But that assumption would be wrong. In fact, I became a voracious student of this subject *because* my total cholesterol and LDL-C (the so-called "bad" cholesterol) levels have been higher than what is recommended. And in that role of student, and as a prominent health blogger and podcaster, I have had the best teachers in the world of health for nearly a decade.

It doesn't bother me at all when people question or are critical of my lack of medical and nutritional health education because I willingly admit that I don't have all the answers. But what I do have are lots of trusted advisers who know the answers to the most pressing questions about health, including my coauthor Dr. Eric Westman, MD, an internist in Durham, North Carolina who is also the co-author of the *New York Times* best-selling book *The New Atkins for a New You*. His great experience and expertise ensure that the science of cholesterol provided in this book is both insightful and up-to-date. Additionally, I tapped into my Rolodex of health experts and conducted brand-new interviews with the leading voices in the fields of health and nutrition.

I have no doubt that this book will be controversial. It challenges conventional wisdom about how we eat and live—rules that we have grown up with and followed for most of our lives. But this bears repeating: While the subject may be complicated, we have done everything possible to make it easy for you to understand. When you have finished this book, my hope is that you will know everything there is to know about cholesterol, as well as what does and does not work for real people.

Until then, hold on to your hats: We've got quite the sordid tale to unravel.