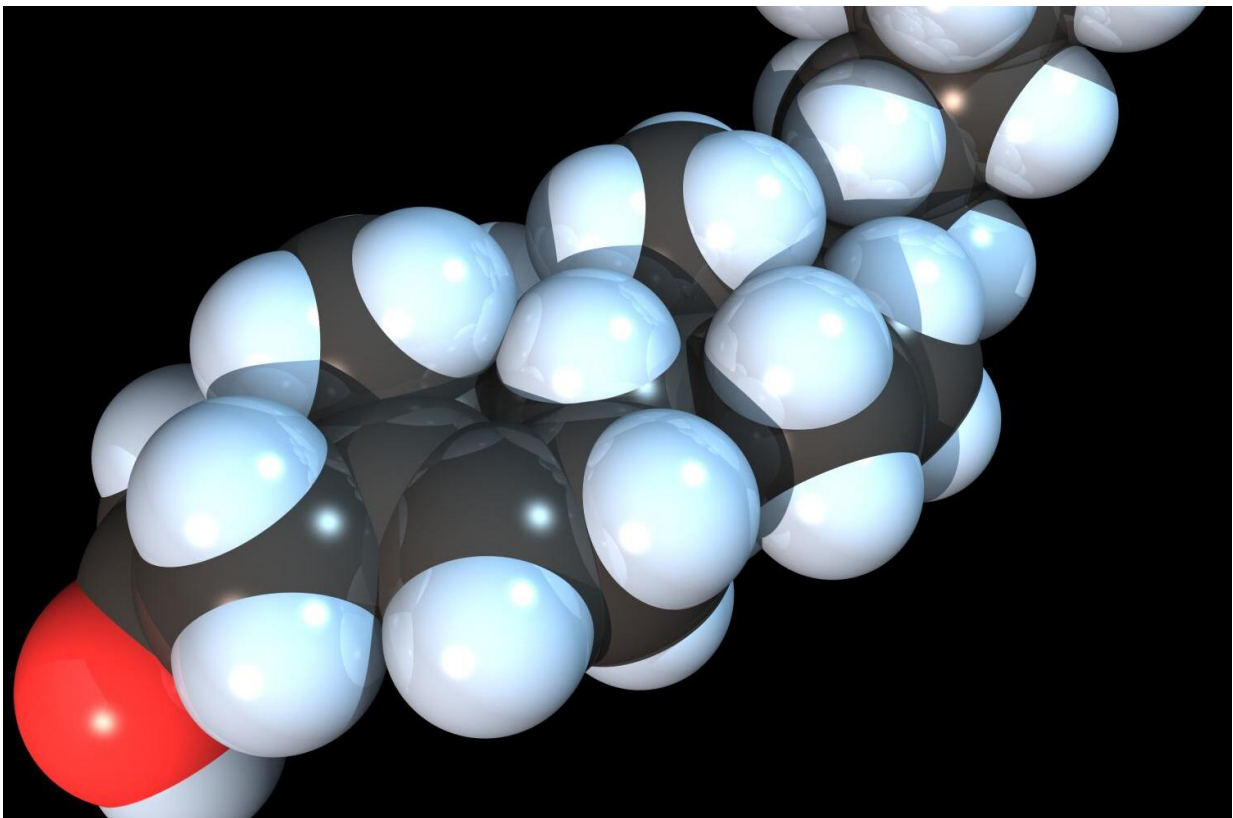


# Healthy food choices in childhood lowers risk of developing cardiovascular disease

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Space-filling model of the Cholesterol molecule. Credit: RedAndr/Wikipedia

Cutting saturated fat in childrens' diets reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease in adulthood, a University of Otago study has found.

Lead author Dr Lisa Te Morenga, of the University's Department of Human Nutrition, says elevated [cholesterol](#) has been linked to cardiovascular disease in adults and preclinical markers of atherosclerosis (the build-up of fats and cholesterol on artery walls) in children which increases risk of cardiovascular disease.

The joint University of Otago and World Health Organization (WHO) study, just published in *Plos One*, found that reducing intakes of foods rich in saturated fat results in a significant reduction in cholesterol levels throughout childhood without any evidence of harmful effects on growth and development.

Dr Te Morenga and colleagues came to their conclusions following a review and meta-analysis of international data from published studies that involved male and female children, adolescents and young adults between the ages of 2 to 19 years.

Cardiovascular disease accounts for 31% of premature deaths globally and imposes a huge economic burden on countries in terms of health-care costs and lost productivity. It is predicted that increases in non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular [disease](#), over the next 20 years could cost up to 75 percent of global [gross domestic product](#).

While fat is an important part of children's diets, the greatest benefits on [cholesterol levels](#) were seen when saturated fat was replaced with unsaturated fat. Results further suggest that the greatest reduction in cholesterol occurred when saturated fat intake was less than 10% of total energy intake.

Dr Te Morenga says the study is being used by the WHO as part of the evidence base for soon-to-be released recommendations on saturated and trans-fatty acids.

"Interventions targeting reduction in saturated fat intakes amongst children and adolescents could translate into major cost savings by reducing risk of [cardiovascular disease](#) in later life," she says.

High-fibre fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, lean meats and reduced fat dairy foods should be the core components of children's diets, rather than highly processed fried and nutrient-poor fast foods and snacks, processed meats and fatty meats.

**More information:** Lisa Te Morenga et al. Health effects of saturated and trans-fatty acid intake in children and adolescents: Systematic review and meta-analysis, *PLOS ONE* (2017). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0186672](#)

Provided by University of Otago

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