

Heart Disease: At-Risk Swedes Healthier After Adopting Lifestyle Changes

By ACSH Staff — March 10, 2016



[1] Healthy lifestyle via [Shutterstock](#) [2]

Apparently folks in Sweden have stepped up their game in the fight against cardiovascular disease, based on a marked decline in the population's overall cholesterol levels. The best part is that this lowering had less to do with medicinal interventions, and more with residents adopting healthier lifestyles.

According to a study published in *European Health Journal* covering 1994 to 2014, researchers attribute the reduction in cholesterol — from 6.2 to 5.5 mmol/L — to reduced fat intake coupled with an increase in fiber from fruits, vegetables and grains. Cholesterol lowering drugs, or statins, such as Lipitor and Zocor, played a role, but accounted for only about one third of the decline.

According to Dr. Mats Eliasson, professor at the Department of Public Health and Clinical Medicine and practitioner at Sunderby Hospital in Lulea, the largest decrease occurred among the most high-risk groups. The results were more pronounced among the elderly; women without a university education; those with a higher risk of cardiovascular disease; and individuals who had been treated for high blood pressure or experienced a previous cardiac event.

High cholesterol levels among the obese had also decreased substantially, with these individuals now showing equally good levels as their normal-weight counterparts.

"We can see that the improvement is most noticeable among those who profit the most from it," said Eliasson, as quoted in [Science Codex](#) [3].

What's behind the surge to adopt a healthier lifestyle? Marie Eriksson, associate professor and statistician at Umea University, and co-author of the study, points to the success of primary and secondary prevention interventions across healthcare centers and the closing of the healthcare disparity gap.

"Seeing that women without university education now have the same low cholesterol levels, or that obese persons have equally good levels as normal-weight persons, confirms that health care is

now offered at the same terms," says Eriksson.

Cholesterol is a key player in the [heart health risk factor triad](#) ^[4] — with the other two factors being high blood pressure and smoking. And although cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death in Sweden, this evidence supports lifestyle modifications as a viable intervention approach to cholesterol reduction — and thus cardiac events — among at-risk groups.

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/03/10/at-risk-swedes-healthier-after-adopting-lifestyle-changes>
Links

[1] http://acsh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/shutterstock_132261116.jpg

[2] <http://www.shutterstock.com>

[3] http://www.sciencecodex.com/improved_lifestyle_led_to_decreased_cholesterol_and_less_cardiac_death-177020

[4] http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/risk_factors.htm