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Nutrient in poultry dark meat may have cardiovascular benefits

By [Rita Jane Gabbett](#) on 3/1/2012

A nutrient found in the dark meat of poultry may provide protection against coronary heart disease (CHD) in women with high cholesterol, according to a study by researchers at NYU Langone Medical Center.

The study, published online in the European Journal of Nutrition, evaluated the effects of taurine, a naturally-occurring nutrient found in the dark meat of turkey and chicken, as well as in some fish and shellfish, on CHD. It revealed that higher taurine intake was associated with significantly lower CHD risk among women with high total cholesterol levels. The same association was not seen in women with low cholesterol levels, however.

"Taurine, at least in its natural form, does seem to have a significant protective effect in women with high cholesterol," said principal investigator Yu Chen, associate professor of epidemiology at NYU School of Medicine, in a news release. While there have been some animal studies that indicate taurine may be beneficial to cardiovascular disease, this is the first published prospective study to look at serum taurine and CHD in humans, she explained.

Chen and colleagues conducted their study using data and samples from the NYU Women's Health Study. The original study enrolled more than 14,000 women, 34 to 65 years of age, between 1985 and 1991 at a breast cancer-screening center in New York City. Upon enrollment, a wide range of medical, personal and lifestyle information was recorded and the data and samples continue to be used for a variety of medical studies.

For the serum taurine study, funded by the American Heart Association, the researchers measured taurine levels in serum samples collected in 1985 – before disease occurrence – for 223 NYUWHS participants who developed or died from CHD during the study follow up period between 1986 and 2006. The researchers then compared those samples to the taurine levels in serum samples collected at the same time for 223 participants who had no history of cardiovascular disease.

The comparison revealed serum taurine was not protective of CHD overall. However, among women with high cholesterol, those with high levels of serum taurine were 60 percent less likely to develop or die from CHD in the study, compared to women with lower serum taurine levels.

"If these findings are confirmed, one day we might be able to suggest that someone with high cholesterol eat more poultry, specifically dark meat," said Chen.

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