

「零膽固醇？」

現時市面上很多包裝食品都特意標明「零膽固醇」，以此作為賣點，因為高膽固醇患者越來越多，甚至有年輕化的趨勢。但大家有沒有留意到，最近有些包裝食品反而以「添加固醇」作為賣點，並聲稱能降低膽固醇！究竟是怎麼回事呢？

仔細看，這個「固醇」前面還有兩個字，全名是「植物固醇」。顧名思義，它來自植物，並非人體或動物體內的膽固醇。之所以同稱為「固醇」，是因為兩者結構相近，因此在吸收和代謝過程中，植物固醇會與動物性膽固醇競爭。膽固醇要被人體吸收，必須與蛋白質、磷脂質及小腸的接受器結合；換句話說，如果攝取足夠的植物固醇，它就會搶先佔據接受器，並與蛋白質及磷脂質結合，使動物性膽固醇無法被吸收。研究顯示，每天攝取 2 克植物固醇，配合均衡飲食，有助降低壞膽固醇達 7.5% - 12%。

植物固醇存在於多種植物性食物，如穀類、蔬果、堅果、豆類等，但要攝取 2 克植物固醇並不容易。事實上，天然食物中的植物固醇含量非常低，例如要吃下約 5.8 公斤椰菜花，才能攝取 1 克植物固醇！有見及此，現時已有市售食品額外添加植物固醇，如豆漿、食用油、牛油等，以幫助消費者達到每日所需攝取量。以某品牌豆漿為例，每盒 250 毫升就含有 2 克植物固醇；另一款植物牛油，每 25 克就有 2 克植物固醇。兩者相比之下，選擇豆漿較理想，因為植物牛油脂肪含量較高。

不過，單靠植物固醇並不足以降低膽固醇，還需要：

- 戒食高膽固醇食物
- 減少飽和脂肪攝取
- 避免反式脂肪
- 恆常運動

才能真正維持心血管健康。

「zero cholesterol?」

Nowadays, many packaged foods prominently display “zero cholesterol” as a selling point, as the number of people with high cholesterol is increasing, and the trend is even affecting younger individuals. But have you noticed that recently some packaged foods are instead promoting “added sterols” and claiming they can lower cholesterol? What’s going on here?

Look closely—the word “sterol” actually has one more character in front of it. The full term is “plant sterol.” As the name suggests, it comes from plants, not from the cholesterol found in humans or animals. The reason they share the term “sterol” is because their structures are similar. This similarity allows plant sterols to compete with animal cholesterol during absorption and metabolism. For cholesterol to be absorbed by the human body, it must bind with proteins, phospholipids, and receptors in the small intestine. If you consume enough plant sterols, they will occupy these receptors first and bind with proteins and phospholipids, preventing animal cholesterol from being absorbed. Research shows that consuming 2 grams of plant sterols per day, along with a balanced diet, can help reduce LDL (“bad”) cholesterol by 7.5% to 12%.

Plant sterols are found in many plant-based foods such as grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and legumes. However, reaching 2 grams of plant sterols is not easy. In fact, the amount in natural plant foods is very low—for example, you would need to eat about 5.8 kg of cauliflower just to get 1 gram of plant sterols! For this reason, many commercially available foods now have added plant sterols to help consumers meet their daily intake. Common examples include soy milk, cooking oil, and margarine. For instance, one brand of soy milk contains 2 grams of plant sterols per 250 ml, while a plant-based margarine contains 2 grams per 25 grams. Between the two, soy milk is the better choice because margarine is high in fat.

However, relying solely on plant sterols is not enough to lower cholesterol. You also need to:

- Avoid high-cholesterol foods
- Reduce saturated fat intake
- Avoid trans fats
- Exercise regularly

Only then can you truly maintain cardiovascular health.