

FEATURE – USDA PARTNERS IN HEART DISEASE STUDY

INTRO: Heart disease causes one quarter of the deaths in the United States. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more on a joint study between USDA and Tufts University to understand, prevent and treat heart disease. (1:38)

DOCTOR ERNIE SCHAEFER BECAME INTERESTED IN HEART DISEASE VERY EARLY IN HIS MEDICAL CAREER.

Dr. Ernie Schaefer, USDA ARS Funded Researcher for Tufts University: It started when I was a medical resident in New York City at Mount Sinai Hospital and three patients died in the coronary care unit and I decided that this was a disease that should be studied.

SINCE THEN DOCTOR SCHAEFER HAS STUDIED HEART DISEASE AT TUFTS UNIVERSITY IN BOSTON IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE. MUCH OF HIS WORK WITH TUFTS AND U-S-D-A HAS INVOLVED INCREASING H-D-L, OR GOOD CHOLESTEROL AND DECREASING L-D-L, OR BAD CHOLESTEROL.

Schaefer: This is a normal coronary artery then as we age and as we get exposed to more and more elevations in LDL cholesterol. The cholesterol deposits in the artery wall and HDL is actually important for removing that cholesterol. But if the cholesterol continues to build up there's also proliferation of smooth muscle cells in the artery and of course the terminal event here can be a clot and then when this happens you have a heart attack.

RESEARCHERS HAVE KNOWN FOR SOME TIME THAT HEALTHIER DIETS, EXERCISE, NOT SMOKING AND TAKING CERTAIN DRUGS LIKE STATINS HELP REDUCE HARMFUL L-D-L CHOLESTEROL. BUT SCHAEFER SAYS RECENT STUDIES HAVE FOCUSED ON NIACIN...A SIMPLE NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENT.

Schaefer: Niacin actually markedly increases the ability of HDL to remove cholesterol from cells.

SCHAEFER SAYS WHILE DRUGS AND VITAMINS OFFER HOPE IN TREATING HEART DISEASE HE SAYS LIFE STYLE CHANGE IS THE CORNERSTONE OF THERAPY. FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M BOB ELLISON.