**Overview**

- **Phytochemicals**, or "plant chemicals," have received attention for their beneficial effects on chronic diseases. Large scale studies showed that the consumption of fruits and vegetables may help prevent **coronary heart disease**.

- Phytochemicals make up three groups based on their chemistry: sterols, flavonoids, and sulfur compounds. Plant sterols are fat soluble and have been incorporated into margarine spreads.

- They are naturally occurring components of plant cell membranes, just like cholesterol is part of animal cell membranes.

- The three most abundant plant sterols are: Beta-sitosterol, Campesterol, and Stigmasterol.

**Where can I find these?**

- You can find plant sterols in products such as Take Control and Benecol, which are margarine-like spreads available in the dairy section of your local supermarket.

- These products have been authorized by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) to include cholesterol-lowering claims on their labels.

- Authorization of these claims is based on the evidence that these spreads may help lower LDL cholesterol, which in turn, would reduce the risk of **coronary heart disease** in some individuals.

**Proposed Health Effects**

Since the 1950’s it has been recognized that plant sterols reduce serum LDL cholesterol concentrations by an average of 10-15%. Plant sterols and their derivatives act in the intestinal track by inhibiting the intestinal absorption of cholesterol. Thus, when plant sterols are part of a regular diet, they lower serum cholesterol concentrations.

**Future Research**

Future areas of research will likely exist in the area of plant sterol consumption and cancer risk.