



Thumbs-Up on Fats

Good Fat Doesn't Make Us Fat

by Judith Fertig

In an era of too much information, the role of fats in our diet has been a victim of not enough information. Today's turnaround in nutritional thinking acknowledges natural fats as being

vital to heart health and weight loss.

Heart Health Benefit

A recent metastudy in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, a journal of

the American College of Physicians, concluded that saturated fat does not appear to increase heart disease risk, overturning almost 60 years of accepted medical thought. The researchers analyzed data from 76 studies involving more than 600,000 people and found that those that ate the most saturated, or "bad", fat did not show a higher risk of cardiovascular disease compared with those that ate the least. Note that processed trans fats remain a villain, still deemed a risk to heart health per the metastudy.

The misleading information began in the 1950s, when Physiologist Ancel Keys, Ph.D., discovered a correlation between diets high in saturated fats and higher cholesterol levels. Soon, the low-fat diet was born.

In 2000, further research introduced the concepts of good and bad fats. More recent analysis confirmed this finding with the refinement that saturated fats increase both types of cholesterol. However, the latest research from the journal *BMJ* shows that saturated fat does not increase the number of LDL, or "bad", particles, a predictor of cardiovascular disease. Instead, it makes existing LDL particles larger, a fairly benign situation in regard to such disease.

Weight Loss Benefit

Fat doesn't even make you fat, claims Mark Hyman, a well-known medical doctor in Lenox, Massachusetts, and author of *Eat Fat, Get Thin: Why the Fat We Eat Is the Key to Sustained Weight Loss and Vibrant Health*. "The theory that all calories have the same impact on your weight and metabolism remains one of the most persistent nutrition myths," says this practitioner of functional medicine who points out that we've been sidetracked by wrong thinking.

"Eating fat can make you lean. Healthy cell walls made from high-quality fats are better able to metabolize insulin, which keeps blood sugar better regulated. Without proper blood sugar control, the body socks away fat for a rainy day. The right fats

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also increase fat burning, diminish hunger and reduce fat storage," he notes.

Whole30, a 30-day diet revolving around clean eating, also emphasizes healthy fats. Devised in 2009 by Dallas Hartwig, a functional medicine practitioner and certified sports nutritionist, and Melissa Hartwig, a certified sports nutritionist, the program aims to reduce inflammation, detoxify the body and reset metabolism. The Salt Lake City, Utah, authors of the *New York Times* bestselling *The Whole30* recommend healthy fats to keep us full and rev up metabolism. Recommended healthy fats include coconut milk and oil, avocados, olive oil, organic ghee (clarified butter) and raw nuts.

Josh Axe, a natural medicine practitioner and clinical nutritionist in Nashville, Tennessee, recommends the healthy fats contained in avocados, organic butter and ghee from grass-fed cows and goats, coconut oil, extra virgin olive oil, and other foods high in omega-3 fatty acids such as salmon, sardines, walnuts, chia seeds and flax seeds.

"Butter's experiencing a comeback as a healthy fat as its benefits become more widely known," says Axe. "The omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids in butter help the brain function properly and improve skin health." Ghee, an ancient Indian version of butter, is lactose- and casein-free, while being loaded with fat-soluble vitamins A, D and E, says Axe. These vitamins are best absorbed by the body when they're in a fat substance and then stored in the gastrointestinal tract, keeping metabolism and digestion on track, he notes. Ghee's high level of vitamin K2, best known as a natural blood coagulator, "also helps strengthen bones, while the fatty acids found in it improve digestion and reduce inflammation."

Healthy Levels of Fat

"If you're active, about 40 percent of your calories should come from carbohydrates, another 30 percent from protein and the other 30 percent from

PRIME SOURCES OF HEALTHY FATS

Functional medicine physician Mark Hyman suggests that we include four to five servings of fat in our diets every day. "In the last five years, the scientific evidence has been mounting that high-fat diets outperform low-fat diets for weight loss and for revising every single indication of heart disease risk, including abnormal cholesterol, diabetes, hypertension and inflammation," he says.

Each amount listed indicates a serving size.

Nuts (a handful of walnuts, almonds, macadamia nuts or cashews)

Seeds (a handful of pumpkin, sunflower or flaxseed)

Most plant-based liquid oils (one tablespoon of olive, safflower, sesame, avocado, macadamia, grape

seed or walnut oil)

Fatty fish (4 ounces of salmon, herring, mackerel, sardines, tuna or trout)

Avocado (one-half to one avocado)

Extra virgin coconut oil (one tablespoon)

Organic coconut milk (one-quarter cup)

Olives (one-quarter cup)

Grass-fed animal butter, clarified butter or ghee (one tablespoon)

Aim to eat fats that remain liquid (not solid) at room temperature; it's a sure sign of heart-healthy, unsaturated fats.

Source: Adapted from Eat Fat, Get Thin, by Mark Hyman, M.D.

fat in general," says Axe, adding that this has the added benefit of helping prevent arteriosclerosis. "Some people may consume a greater percentage of healthy fats if the goal is to become a fat burner."

"There is no one-size-fits-all approach to weight loss and health,"

Hyman reminds us. "Low-carb, higher-fat diets work for most people, but for some, they may not be optimal in the long term."

Judith Fertig writes food health articles and cookbooks from Overland Park, KS (JudithFertig.com).

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