

FAT IN FOOD

Quality vs. Quantity

Recently, the story on fat has been evolving. Leading experts suggest a shift in focus from how much fat we eat to what type of fat we eat.

Which Fats are the Right Fats?

Research suggests that the type of fat that we eat is more connected to our risk for heart disease than how much fat we eat. More specifically, too much saturated fat found in solid, animal fats like butter, red meat and cheese and too much artificial trans fat found in foods with partially hydrogenated oils puts us at a higher risk. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats found in liquid vegetable oils, nuts and fish actually lower our risk for heart disease. Instead of "eat less fat," the message is changing to "eat the right fat."

Why a Change?

It turns out that when people simply eat less total fat, they tend to replace the fat with other things – primarily sugar and other refined carbohydrates. This also happens when food products are changed to a low fat or fat-free version. Unfortunately, this is not a positive move for overall diet and health and might end up putting us at higher disease risk. The key is to put the focus on eating better fats and keeping overall calories in check, not just focusing on whether or not things are "low fat."



Bottom Line

- Choose healthy fats more (vegetable oils, nuts, fish, avocado)
- Choose unhealthy fats less (partially hydrogenated oils, fatty meats, butter, whole milk cheeses)
- Don't confuse "low fat" with low calorie or healthy. Many "low fat" products are high in sugar and other refined carbohydrates with as many or more calories than the original product.
- To manage your weight, look at total calories from all sources, not just from fat.

References:

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2. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. 7th Edition, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2010.
3. WS Harris, D Mozaffarian, E Rimm, P Kris-Etherton, LL Rudel, LJ Appel, MM Engler, MB Engler, and F Sacks. Omega-6 Fatty Acids and Risk for Cardiovascular Disease: A Science Advisory from the American Heart Association Nutrition Subcommittee of the Council on Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Metabolism; Council on Cardiovascular Nursing; and Council on Epidemiology and Prevention. Circulation, Feb 2009; 119: 902 - 907. Published April 2011. Written by Jennifer M. Ignacio, MS, RD Compass Group, North America.