

So is fat okay now?



There has been a lot of new information coming out lately regarding fat and sugar. First fat was the big nasty and everyone steered clear of any fat, often favouring low fat or “lite” versions of food believing we were doing the right thing for our arteries. Now it seems this was the wrong thing to do as these products generally have had the fat content replaced by extra sugar. And sugar is now the new demon.

Latest findings

Latest findings show that sugar is the thing doing us the most damage these days because it is so readily converted to fat for storage within the body, including within the liver. It is pro-inflammatory and causes oxidation which accelerates damage and ageing throughout the body. So, does this mean we can now eat all the fat we like? After all, it has been shown that populations with some of the highest fat intakes also exhibit some of the lowest incidence of cardiovascular disease.



Cardiovascular risk

Well, when it comes to cardiovascular risk, yes, eating fat is fine. However there are a couple of guidelines which we'll look at later.

So what is the interaction between sugar and fat in the blood? Sugar (including that readily obtained by the body from breaking down excessive carbohydrates) can cause oxidative damage to the fats circulating in our blood. This is the time when high blood fat and cholesterol levels become a problem. When blood fats are in good condition and circulating in healthy, undamaged blood vessels, they are protective. It is only when inflammatory damage has occurred (usually from excessive sugars), that plaques can form, leading to heart attack and stroke.

Excessive carbohydrate and sugar intake

The other interesting thing is that excessive carbohydrate and sugar intake is more likely to cause an increase in your blood fats than eating dietary fat. This is because one of the ways the body deals with excessive carbohydrates is for the liver to convert it into fatty acids.

So don't feel guilty about including fat in your diet. Stop buying low fat versions of food just because you think it's best for your health. Simply follow these 5 guidelines:

1. Trans fat intake is the only fat shown to have a significantly detrimental effect on cardiovascular risk. This should be avoided wherever possible. (See below for a list of the different types of fats and their main sources)
2. Omega-3 has been shown to have a significantly protective impact on cardiovascular risk and should be included wherever possible.
3. The ideal ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 intake is 2:1. The average dietary intake is closer to 20:1 and this imbalance promotes its own inflammation. So enjoy eating sources of omega-6 but make sure you are also eating good sources of omega-3.
4. Only if you are already suffering insulin resistance and inflammatory damage should you moderate saturated fat intake, taking care not to subsequently increase your carbohydrate intake to compensate.
5. Fat is an essential nutrient and generally only detrimental when consumed in excess, along with excessive calories overall, inadequate exercise and inadequate fruit and vegetable intake.



Types of fat

1. Saturated fat – found in meat, dairy, eggs and coconut oil
2. Monounsaturated fat – found in meat, poultry, dairy, eggs, avocado, nuts, seeds, olive oil and canola oil.
3. Polyunsaturated fat:
 - Omega-6 – Found in nuts, seeds, poultry, grapeseed oil, sunflower oil, sesame and soybean oils.
 - Omega-3 – Grassfed beef, dairy, seafood, fish, flaxseeds, fish oil and flaxseed oil.
4. Trans fats – partially dehydrogenated fats, deep fried foods, commercial cakes, biscuits and pastries.

The brilliant thing is that most natural foods contain a variety of types of fat, not just saturated or unsaturated, and they are generally in the best ratio for your body's health. What's more, natural, unprocessed foods are also packed with all the antioxidants needed to offset any oxidative damage that may occur to the fats they contain. This is the beauty of nature.