

Eating Healthy Fats, Part II: No More Low-Fat Anything

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As you begin to read this article, you need to know that I'm a cholesterol and fat radical. Much of what you're about to read may be counter to what your cardiologist has told you, as well as some of the ever-confusing "popular wisdom" out there. Know that there is good science behind everything I'm going to say, but there isn't space here to reference it all. (Feel free to contact me for details if you like).

Remember when we were all told that the way to lose weight and fix our heart disease lay in eating low fat foods? Suddenly we were inundated by low fat dairy (taking an already highly-processed food and making it even more processed), low fat crackers, even low fat brownies. In changing these foods to lower fat versions, even more of the naturally occurring products were removed than before. This led to tasteless cheese with a weird texture; I feel that most people eat even more of this at one time because their brain doesn't feel as though it's really eaten cheese. It also led to LOTS more sugar in our diet, because to make a brownie edible without the fat, you have to add even more sugar. Flavor is carried in fat.

As I mentioned last month, the types of fat common in our food chain have changed. Be very careful about this, because trans fats simply don't work in the human body correctly, and increased intake of Omega 6's cause more inflammation. This inflammation is the true cause for heart disease, not just the amount of total fats in your diet. Having high levels of LDL cholesterol implies that you probably have plaque in your vessels. Plaque alone doesn't mean that you'll have a heart attack, though it will lead to hypertension as the vessel becomes more narrow. Even small amounts of plaque that is inflamed (unstable) will increase your chance of a heart attack, as the inflammation causes the plaque to rupture, mix with blood clots and flow downstream in the vessel, blocking it off and causing a heart attack. So remember, it's inflammation that is the problem, and inflammation comes from excess Omega 6 fatty acids, sugar and stress.

Many of you have probably been told that you have high cholesterol and need statin drugs. You've probably also been told that you need to eat low fat foods to bring the cholesterol down. In reality, the "total" cholesterol number is pretty worthless; it's the break down of HDL, LDL and triglycerides that matter. Triglycerides are a reflection of sugars or things that act like sugar in your diet—cake, candy, alcohol, white bread, pasta. HDL, which is the good stuff, is raised by eating foods with plant sterols---legumes and cooked greens, primarily—as well as increasing exercise. LDL, the bad stuff, is a reflection of saturated fat intake (anything from an animal: meat, eggs and dairy) as well as exercise. Some of us are lucky; our genes allow us to continue to eat lots of saturated fats without exercising much. Others of us will find that to continue to eat a lot of fat will require lots more exercise. What you want is a naturally low LDL, low triglycerides and high HDL. What it takes to get there will vary for each individual, but most of us can get to healthy levels on our own, if we're willing to make lifestyle changes.

So what fats should you eat? Nuts, seeds, olive oil, avocados. Plenty of them, remembering that they are calorie-dense. Some meat, if your LDL can tolerate it---just remember that it shouldn't be the "main attraction" of the meal. Same goes for dairy; consume whole fat, preferably raw

and organic, in small amounts. Egg whites are fine; egg yolks are very inflammatory so some of us need to limit them.

Healthy fats in your diet will also help you feel full, have smoother skin and shinier hair. Guacamole, anyone?