



Dietary Fats And Your Health



Dr. Kate Thomsen and Silky

Fifty years ago, scientists and doctors began telling people to decrease their dietary fat intake. High dietary fat was being linked to cardiovascular disease – heart attacks and strokes. At the same time, media images of men and particularly of women became leaner. We equated “fat on the inside” with premature death and “fat on the outside” with poor body image and low self esteem. The public health message was that “all fat is bad.” Over time, people began to limit the fat content of their diet. Steak houses and burger joints of the 1960’s and 70’s made way for the pasta restaurants that still dominate the commercial food outlets in my neighborhood. And yet we are no healthier in mind or body than we were fifty years ago. We are more obese than ever. Even though we eat less red meat we are unhealthy because the red meat we eat is commercially raised and grain fed - a process that substantially increases the saturated fat content over free range or game meat. We eat more processed foods. These usually have high sugar and fat content or fake sugar and fake fat. These “new to nature” molecules have health consequences we are just beginning to understand.

Dietary fats play an important role in our health. The average American diet consists of 30 – 40 % fat. We would be healthier with a 20 – 30% fat diet. Vegetarians typically have a 10% fat diet. But it is more important to consider the types of fat you are consuming than the amount. In picking the Good Fats, you will most assuredly lower the total amount.

Saturated Fat – is solid at room temperature. Major sources are animal products: dairy and red meat. They increase risk of cardiovascular disease by increasing LDL cholesterol. They also may increase HDL (the good cholesterol) a little. They contribute to inflammation and poorer cell communication. These are the Bad Fats and should be used sparingly. Notable exception is coconut oil which is a plant fat that is solid at room temperature. Molecularly it is a smaller sized saturated fat and is processed differently by the body - primarily burned as energy. It is stable at high temperatures (won't go rancid) and one of the best fats to cook with.

Trans Fats – solid or semi-solid at room temperature. Synthetic (also “new to nature”) fat made to extend shelf life of the fat. Trans fats effect all three blood fats adversely: raises LDL, lowers HDL, and raises triglycerides. Sources include: margarine, vegetable shortening, fast foods, many restaurant foods, and packaged goods. Packages may say “zero trans fats” and still contain 0.5mg trans fats per serving. Look for “partially hydrogenated fats or oils” on the label and if present, put them back on the shelf. Don't worry, these products can stay on the shelf for 20

years. That sounds like a dead food to me!!! Ask your local eateries what oils they cook with and demand No Trans Fats.

Unsaturated Fats – liquid at room temperature, these fats are considered the healthy fats. Sources are primarily plants and fish. These are the GOOD FATS. They lower LDL and raise HDL cholesterol. Two subtypes: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated.

Monounsaturated Fats (MUFAs) – liquid at room temperature. Sources include: olive oil, olives, peanut oil, peanuts, cashews, almonds, most other nuts, nut butters, avocados. There are many uses for these flavorful oils including dressings, dips and garnishes. If cooking with monounsaturated oils, be sure to know their smoke point so you don't cause rancidity or flames.

Polyunsaturated Fats (PUFAs) – liquid at room temperature. Two categories:

Omega 6 – sources of these fats include: evening primrose oil, black currant, borage oil, nuts and seeds. The body can make Omega 6 oils from a precursor fat called linoleic acid. Linoleic acid is an “essential fatty acid”; it must be taken in through the diet because the body cannot manufacture it. Sources of linoleic acid include: safflower, sunflower, corn, soy, and canola oils

Omega 3 – sources of these fats include: cold water fish (salmon, halibut...), flaxseed, omega-enriched eggs, walnuts, brazil nuts, and sea vegetables. The body can make Omega 3 oils from a precursor fat called linolenic acid. Linolenic acid is also a

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dietary “essential fatty acid.” Sources include: flaxseed and black currant seed oil. These fats are anti-inflammatory and beneficial for cardiovascular disease, mood disorders, cognitive health, and skin conditions.

Omega 6 fats are much more common in our diets today than they were when we were hunter-gatherers. Today, because of all our processed foods made with cheap vegetable oils (corn oil, etc), the ratio of Omega 6 to Omega 3 is >20:1. Ideally we are suited for a diet with a ratio of Omega 6 to Omega 3 of 2:1 – 4:1. Too much Omega 6 fats can inhibit the anti-inflammatory effects of the Omega 3s.

We are now able to measure red blood cell fatty acid distribution and make individualized recommendations on changing your diet or supplements to maximize the health benefits of bal-

anced dietary fats. We'll review these benefits more closely and discuss specific dietary and supplement concerns in the next issue.



Dr Kate Thomsen has a holistic health practice in Pennington, NJ. She is board certified in Family Medicine and in Integrative/Holistic Medicine. For more information visit online at www.drkatethomsen.com. For information about appointments or our upcoming group programs, call the office at 609-818-9700.

