

The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

Several decades ago the modern world went crazy with its dietary habits. People were told to stop eating fats because they led to weight gain and heart disease. As a result we all stopped eating many of our favourite foods thinking they were bad for us. Ever since fat was demonized, people turned to refined carbs, sugar and processed food instead. Sure fat can make you gain weight and contribute to chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer and stroke. But it is important to note that not all fats are created equal. So welcome back eggs, cheese and dark chocolate! In fact, as you've probably heard more recently, certain types of fat are actually good for your health. Studies now show that fat, including saturated fat isn't the devil it was once made out to be. Foods rich in healthful fats like nuts, olive oils, and fish have protective effects, particularly for cardio vascular disease. They also help you absorb a host of vitamins, fill you up so you eat less, boost energy, keep skin and hair healthy and even keep you warm. Best of all these healthy fats taste good.

The key is to focus on good fats and like the saying goes "moderation is the key". The fats found in processed junk foods and store bought pre-packaged baked goods aren't so good for us, while the fat from natural foods like avocados, grass fed beef and olives can be very beneficial. However a diet too high in saturated fats - found in animal products and some vegetable oils, can lead to heart problems, but eating the right amount of unsaturated fats can protect the heart. Confusing - I know. Unsaturated fats include monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. They are considered to be the "good for you" fats. Both are considered essential fatty acids because our bodies cannot produce them on its own. The average adult should get 20-35 percent of their daily calories from fat and less than 10 percent of their calories from saturated fats. So which "fattening" foods should you be eating?

Olives and olive oil are the original healthy fat. Out of all of the healthy oils extra virgin olive oil is the king. This fat is an essential component of the Mediterranean diet, which has been shown to have numerous health benefits. EVOO contains vitamin E and K, and is loaded with powerful antioxidants. These antioxidants fight cancer and inflammation, lower blood pressure, improve cholesterol and are incredibly effective in improving cardiovascular health.

Avocados do more than provide the keystone ingredient for amazing guac. These days, the avocado has become an incredibly popular food among health conscious individuals. It is often referred to as a superfood, which is not surprising given its health properties. Avocados are very nutritious and contain a wide variety of nutrients, including 20 different vitamins and minerals. Again, avocado is a high fat food. In fact, 77% of the calories in it are from fat, making it one of the fattiest plant foods in existence. But they don't just contain *any* fat... the majority of the fat in avocado is oleic acid. Oleic acid has been linked to reduced inflammation and been shown to have beneficial effects on genes linked to cancer. Half an avocado also contains 3.4 grams of fibre, including soluble and insoluble, both of which your body needs to keep the digestive system running smoothly. Plus, soluble fibre slows the breakdown of carbohydrates in your body, helping you feel full for longer. The fats in avocado are also pretty resistant to heat-induced oxidation, making avocado oil a healthy and safe choice for cooking.

Coconut, and coconut oil, are the richest sources of saturated fat on the planet. Coconut oil is one of the few foods that can also be classified as a superfood. In fact, about 90 percent of the fatty acids in them are saturated. Even so, populations that consume large amounts of coconut do not have high levels of obesity and heart disease and they are in excellent health. Its unique combination of fatty acids can have profound positive effects on health. This includes fat loss, better brain function and various other amazing benefits. Coconut and coconut oil are metabolized differently. They go straight to the liver from the digestive tract, where they are used as a quick source energy or turned into ketone bodies, which can have therapeutic effects on brain disorders like epilepsy and Alzheimer's. Need I go on?

Eggs are an inexpensive and easy source of protein. People often think egg whites are a healthier option than whole eggs because they contain less fat, and while it is true that the egg yolk contains some fat, it's also packed with good fat and important nutrients. Making eggs one of the most nutrient dense foods on the planet. Research finds that eating eggs especially in the morning can help you feel full and satisfied longer, making it easier to resist those treats in the office pantry. Eggs that are raised on omega-3 feed tend to be higher in omega-3's. (go figure) Omega-3 fats are linked to lower levels of blood triglycerides (fats), reduced risk of clots that block the flow of blood to the heart and brain, and promote a normal heart beat, among other benefits. It is true that eggs are high in cholesterol. In fact, a single egg contains 212 mg, which is over half of the recommended daily intake of 300 mg. However it's important to keep in mind that cholesterol in the diet doesn't necessarily raise cholesterol in the blood. A whole egg even contains powerful antioxidants that protect the eyes and lots of choline, a brain required nutrient that 90 percent of people don't get enough of. So let's get crackin!

We should all be going "nuts for nuts". Research shows that tree nuts are packed with far more health benefits than their size might indicate. Unless you or someone in your family is allergic, you can count them in as a heart-healthy, cholesterol-reducing superfood. Many weight-conscious people shudder at the idea of nuts as part of a healthy diet. For years, dieters have shunned nuts because of their high fat content. Well, you can forget everything negative you've ever heard about nuts, and delight in knowing they are now considered health food! The key to including the great taste of nuts in a healthy diet without overdoing the fat and calories is portion control and always choosing the low sodium option. Eating as little as one ounce of nuts per day can provide you with all the health benefits. So do it, go nuts!

Bottom line is, FAT is necessary in a healthy diet and when it comes to dietary fat, quantity and quality count. Some fats promote our health positively while others increase our risks of disease. Avoid packaged foods when possible and instead of doing away with fat in your diet, enjoy healthy fats in moderation.

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