



## The Truth about Fat: The Latest Update

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I recently attended a Fat Summit hosted by Integrative and Functional Medicine physician, Mark Hyman, MD, Director of the Center for Functional Medicine at the Cleveland Clinic. Dr. Hyman invited some of the most prestigious U.S. researchers to join this online Summit to share their individual research data. This academic bench of researchers and thought leaders was deep, some of whom included:

Ronald Krause, MD; Daniel Amen, MD; Jeffrey Bland, PhD; Michael Roizen, MD; Chris Kresser, MS, LAC;  
Walter Willett, MD; David Perlmutter, MD; Dean Ornish, MD.

I was so excited to finally hear the latest update about dietary fats and end the great fat debate once and for all. What a long awaited relief this would be.....

This could not have been further from the truth!!

Consistent with the pattern I've seen over my 37 year career, nutrition research from highly respected scholars often conflicts. The reason for this is each researcher is looking at a different piece of the same puzzle. In this case, the effect of a certain dietary fat on one piece of the puzzle may be very different from the effect that fat has on another piece of the puzzle. Hence, each researcher may have a different viewpoint and recommendation about the dietary fat being studied.

So a lot of questions still remain unanswered but some information is very clear. Here's a snippet of the latest research regarding dietary fat and what we need to know ..... for now.

### FATS TO AVOID

#### Trans fats/partially hydrogenated fats

There is no dispute on this one from any researcher. Manmade trans fats, also known as partially hydrogenated fats, are inflammatory and lead to heart disease. Trans fats are still found in fast foods, some restaurant foods and many pre-packaged processed foods.

**Tip: Read labels carefully and refuse to buy any product that contains partially hydrogenated trans fats.**

#### Oxidized fats

Oxidized fats are fats and oils that are heated to high temperatures and heated over and over again (think deep fat fryers). These fats are toxic and inflammatory.

**Tip: Avoid buying fried foods and avoid overheating oils to the smoking point in your own cooking. Lower your**

cooking temperature to medium most of the time.

## Rancid fats

Fats have a certain shelf life where they are at their peak of freshness. Just like fine wine, over exposure to heat and light can damage oils, nuts, seeds and nut butters causing the fat to become oxidized and “rancid”. Rancid oils have a very off putting smell. If you have kept your oils or nuts for an extended period, be sure to smell them to insure they have not become rancid. If they smell funny, toss them.

**Tip: To be safe, avoid buying oils in large containers that you will not use up in 3 – 4 months. And store oils, nuts and nut butters safely in airtight containers in a cool, dark pantry away from heat sources. (Note: Do not store your olive oil next to the stove).**

## REALLY GOOD FATS

### High Quality Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Due to its high polyphenol (antioxidants) content, 100% extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) provides numerous health benefits. Replacing less healthy processed oils (like soybean, corn, sunflower, safflower and canola) with a high quality EVOO provides anti-inflammatory benefits. Some new research is showing that the polyphenols in EVOO may even be synergistic in counteracting some of the negative effects of red meat when the meat is prepared with EVOO.

Contrary to what you may have read about cooking with EVOO at high heat, the polyphenols in a good quality EVOO enable it to hold up to heat in higher temperature cooking and baking especially if short in duration like stir fries. EVOO has been researched extensively throughout the world in many cultures and remains one of our healthiest fat sources.

**An important caveat about EVOO - There is a shocking amount of corruption in the EVOO industry and much (75% - 80%) of the EVOO sold in the US is not 100% virgin olive oil. Keep an eye out for the upcoming March 23<sup>rd</sup> Chews Strategically blog that will discuss this alarming revelation and where you can find high quality 100% EVOO.**

### Omega 3 fatty acids, especially from fatty fish

Research on omega 3 fish oils has remained tried and true. Omega 3 fats are anti-inflammatory and reproducible research continues to show that omega 3 fats provide health benefits for the heart, brain and gut.

Some new research has shown that the omega 3 fats obtained from eating fish were more beneficial than fish oil supplements so try to eat at least 2 servings of fatty cold water fish each week including wild Alaskan salmon, sardines, anchovies, herring or small halibut.

**Other good dietary sources of omega 3 fats include: Omega 3 rich eggs (free range chicken eggs); grass-fed, pastured beef and bison; wild game, walnuts, sea vegetables and flaxseed.**

## EMERGING PROMISING FATS

### Coconut Oil

There's a lot of hype about coconut oil in the media and on the web, some of which is true and some of which is a stretch of the truth. But, newer research about the medium chain triglycerides (MCTs) in coconut oil reveals some special health benefits including being a better fuel for cells and possessing anti-inflammatory properties.

Another bonus of coconut oil is caprylic acid, one of the predominant types of fat in coconut oil. Caprylic acid is a natural antifungal, antiviral and antibacterial making it beneficial for maintaining a healthy balance of the gut microbiota and immune system.

### Avocado and Avocado Oil

Avocado is technically a fruit but the majority of its calories come from heart healthy, monounsaturated fats. Monounsaturated fats have long been considered a preferable fat. Avocado oil has a higher smoking point so it withstands high heat well and can be used for hot or cold food preparations.

## NEUTRAL FATS

### Saturated Fat

Research on saturated fats has produced the most eye opening results recently. Contrary to the 3-decades-old-dogma that saturated fats increase cholesterol and promote heart disease, numerous small studies have disproven this theory. The abundance of these small studies collectively has added enough clout that this research can no longer be ignored.

These studies have pointed out that, in fact, **it is sugar and processed carbohydrates that increase serum cholesterol and triglycerides levels while increasing inflammation leading to heart disease.** Ronald Krause, MD, Senior Scientist and Director of Atherosclerosis Research at Children's Hospital Oakland Research Institute, states that sugar and processed carbs create bad atherogenic fats so they should be reduced significantly or eliminated from our diets.

Dr. Krauss suggests that saturated fats are considered NEUTRAL and do not raise serum cholesterol levels or lead to heart disease. **Unless**, they are eaten with sugar and processed carbs, then collectively they put us at risk. Sugar, processed carbohydrates and saturated fat together create the Standard American Diet (SAD). Americans have been proving for 30 years that the SAD promotes diseases like obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Not good!

**Sugar + Processed Carbs + Saturated Fats = Heart disease and inflammation**

Dr. Krauss does carefully point out, however, that no one is suggesting loading up on saturated fats. Eat and enjoy them in the context of a healthy, low sugar, processed-carb-free eating plan.

Another researcher, Jeff Bland, PhD, co-founder of the Institute for Functional Medicine, suggests that different saturated fats act differently with different risks. And, he agrees that their effect on our bodies depends on what we are eating them with. For example, the saturated fat called palmitic acid, found in butter from feed lot cattle, is very different in composition and how it acts in the body compared to the high omega-3 butter from grass fed, pastured Swiss cows in the 1800s.

In addition, feed lot cows in today's agriculture have been fed growth hormones, chemicals and corn instead of grass so the composition of their saturated fats is quite different and comes with some unwelcomed additives.

Dr. Bland also notes that saturated fats from plant sources act differently in the body than saturated fat from animal sources.

Both researchers agree that saturated fats, eaten with a poor diet, will have very different effects than saturated fats eaten with a clean, plant-based diet.

**TIP: If you choose to eat saturated fats from animal sources (ex. beef, pork, chicken, cheese, butter, 2% or whole milk and yogurt), be sure to choose organic, grass-fed, pastured sources to avoid environmental chemicals.**

## WHAT IF YOU HAVE HEART DISEASE?

As mentioned, not all researchers are on board with these new findings about saturated fat. If you already have heart disease, follow the advice of your cardiologist as you are in a different position for risk and your tolerance for saturated fats may have changed.

Research by Dean Ornish, MD, is the only research so far that has shown dietary strategies that can **reverse** heart disease. You can check out Dr. Ornish's approach to reversing heart disease in his book, Spectrum <http://deanornish.com/books/> and his Ornish Lifestyle Medicine website <http://ornishspectrum.com/>.

## A WORD ABOUT GENETICS

One other piece of this puzzle to consider is our genetic differences. Every one of us is genetically different which means foods and our environment will interact differently with our specific genes. Nutritionists and hopefully health care providers have learned there are no longer One-Size- Fits-All dietary recommendations.

Be sure to perform your own study with an "n" of one. As you transition to the right eating plan for your body (genes) keep an eye on your lab work and how you feel. Communicate with your health care provider and nutritionist what you are doing with your eating plan and lifestyle habits so together you can determine the optimal eating plan for YOU. Your optimal eating plan may be completely different than that of your best friend or co-worker. On the bright side, in the near future, genetic testing will make it much easier to determine the personal nutrition prescription for your genes.

## DIETARY FAT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

So, here's a summary of the most recent dietary recommendations from the Fat Summit with all researchers considered. And, as stated eloquently by Dr. Jeff Bland,

"Be concerned about anything you eat in excess. Everything has a point of toxicity, even air and water. Be less concerned about fats if they're from their original source [as long as the source is clean] and eat everything in moderation".

### DO THIS:

- **Eat 4 ½ - 5 cups of brightly colored, low carbohydrate vegetables plus 2 servings of whole fruit every day.** (All the researchers in the Fat Summit agree on this one!)
- **Eat minimal amounts of Added Sugar** (including white sugar, honey, maple syrup, molasses, palm sugar, coconut sugar, agave, fruit juice concentrates, etc.) and eliminate processed carbohydrates from your eating plan. (All the researchers in the Fat Summit agree on this one, too!!)
- **Use high quality 100% extra virgin, cold pressed olive oil as your dominant fat** for cooking and cold preparations. Cook mostly at medium heat (there are other health reasons to cook at medium heat – that's a future blog!). High quality extra virgin olive oil can handle higher heat if you choose to use it for stir fry.
- **Experiment with extra virgin, cold pressed, organic coconut oil; avocado oil and grass-fed ghee/butter** (if you can tolerate dairy) for high heat cooking and use in moderate amounts.
- **Choose avocados, nuts, seeds and nut butters as other healthy fat options.** Use them as an anchor in your snacks and meals to help stabilize blood glucose and maximize your energy levels.
- **Include cold water, wild fatty fish in your eating plan at least twice weekly** (wild Alaskan salmon, anchovies, sardines, herring, small halibut). If you do not eat fish, check with your health care provider or nutritionist about taking a high quality fish oil or algae-based DHA omega 3 supplement.