

Is a Low-Fat Diet Making You Fat?

If you're cutting back on all fats in your diet, you may be doing yourself more harm than good. That's the upshot of the latest nutritional research that concludes some fats are not only good for us, but they can actually help shed pounds.

In fact, avoiding such fats—in favor of low-fat, high-carb alternatives—can promote weight gain.

Confused? Join the club. For decades, health experts have advised choosing low-fat and fat-free foods—such as margarine, skim milk and unsaturated cooking oils—to lose weight and boost overall health. But that line of one-size-fits-all health advice is being challenged by new studies showing fat is not the great dietary evil we've been led to believe it is.

Brett Osborn, M.D., a member of the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine and author of the new book *Get Serious, A Neurosurgeon's Guide to Optimal Health and Fitness*, explains that not all fats are created equal. Some—such as those found in fish, olive oil, nuts, flax seed, and even certain cuts of meat—are essential for good health. And the real culprits in the nation's obesity epidemic are sugary, high-carb, refined processed foods, many of which carry reduced-fat labels.

"Eating fat does not make you fat," Dr. Osborn tells *Newsmax Health*. "Carbohydrates, on the other hand, drive insulin levels up. Insulin is an inflammatory hormone. And while we do need it to repair ourselves and to build muscle, it has very, very sinister effects and deleterious effects on our health."

In this video, Dr. Osborn, a New York University-trained board-certified neurosurgeon with a secondary certification in anti-aging and regenerative medicine, explains that there are different types of fat.

Some—such as trans fats found in baked goods, pastries and fried foods—cause inflammation in the body, which has been tied to diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer and other health problems. But others—such as omega-3 fatty acids found in fish and other staples of the Mediterranean diet—have anti-inflammatory properties and promote health and even weight loss.

“Do not be afraid to have fat in your diet, you just need to have good fat in your diet,” he notes. “So the olive oil, the omega-3s, the fish—have as much as you like and [avoid] fried foods.”

Dr. Osborne also notes that cell membranes are made of omega-3s. As a result, consuming more foods packed with omega-3s contributes to healthy bodily functions, while eating bad fats can cause cell membranes to malfunction, as well as spur inflammation in the body.

“We obviously want to error on the side of ingesting or eating as much anti-inflammatory fat—the good fat—relative to the bad fat,” he says. “So we want to squelch inflammation.”

Unfortunately, many Americans have bought into the false notion that low-fat foods are always healthier, even though they often contain lots of empty calories, sugar, white processed flour and simple carbohydrates—all of which contribute to weight gain and obesity-related ailments that cost the nation nearly \$150 billion a year in health-care costs.

“The anti-inflammatory fats, which are things like omega-3 fatty acids, which we can get from fish, supplements, walnuts, flax [and olive oil] ... are the things that are lacking in our diet and have been replaced by the inflammatory fats” along with sugary, high-carb processed foods, Dr. Osborn notes.

He adds that residents of nations whose diets are typically high in healthy fats and low in unhealthy fats—such as the

Japanese and those in Mediterranean countries—tend to have longer life spans than Americans, according to the World Health Organization.

“The Japanese have a five-year longevity, if you will, advantage over the Americans. Why? Because they eat a lot of raw food, they keep their simple carbohydrate loads down [and] they’re good-fat-to-bad-fat ratio is better than ours,” he says. “It’s all about the balance. You want to keep the anti-inflammatory fats high and the bad fats ... low.

“And again if you have a lot of pro-inflammatory chemicals in your body, you’re going to have accelerated aging and accelerated disease incidence.”

Here are a few foods containing healthy fats:

Fish: Polyunsaturated fats, such as omega-3 fatty acids found in fish such as salmon and fish-oil supplements, have been shown in many studies to lower the risk for heart disease, boost brain function, ease arthritis symptoms, and help prevent dementia.

Nuts: Natural fatty acids in tree nuts are known to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. Researchers from the University of Toronto found that incorporating about two ounces of tree nuts—almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, macadamias and walnuts—into the diet of people with diabetes helped boost their heart health.

Vegetable oils: Olive oil and other vegetable-based fats—such as canola and palm oils—are loaded with alpha-linolenic acid, a type of omega-3. Switching to a diet low in simple sugars and high in healthy fatty oils can help people with Type 2 diabetes control their blood sugar and lower their heart-disease risks, research has shown. “Every night before I go to bed ... I have two tablespoons of olive oil in addition to tons and tons of omega-3 capsules that I take every day because I’m

not a fish eater,” Dr. Osborn says. He adds: “I usually tell my patients, my friends who ask me, avoid all non-vegetable carbohydrates because that’s going to keep your natural insulin levels low and that’s going to hopefully confer longevity and reduced incidence of age-related diseases.”

Animal products: Moderate amounts of saturated fat in butter, milk, cheese and even lean cuts of beef, poultry and pork don’t clog arteries and may even be beneficial in moderate amounts. Scientists once thought saturated fat raised levels of dangerous cholesterol in the blood. But the latest research shows there are two different kinds of cholesterol particles—small and dense (the kind linked to heart disease) and large and fluffy (which don’t pose a risk). Saturated fat in dairy foods and animal products raises the level of larger particles that are not harmful, but refined carbohydrates boost levels of smaller, more dangerous cholesterol particles.

Dr. Osborn adds that losing weight must also involve exercise and other healthy habits, as well as a nutritious diet.

“Nutrition and training, particularly strength training—they’re both parts of the mix,” he says, recommending about 30 minutes a day at a minimum. He also advises keeping your stress levels down, making sure you get sufficient sleep, and making sure your hormone levels are balanced.

“And one other thing: Also understand that your doctor is not going to save you,” he adds. “If you are not taking full responsibility for your health, or getting serious about your health, nobody’s going to do it for you.”

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