

DIETARY FATS. THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE ESSENTIAL!

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We have all heard that fat is not good for you. But would you be surprised to know that this statement is only partially true? There are dietary fats that significantly contribute to the prevalence of many chronic and life-threatening diseases we see today. There are also dietary fats that can combat and help prevent many of these diseases. So we need to separate the good from the bad, and then make the healthy choices that can substantially improve our overall health and vitality.

The bad. Saturated fats from animal products tend to clog up arteries and deposit in organs, leading to increases in cardiovascular disease and other diseases of fatty degeneration. There is also another, more deadly form of fat that can commonly be found in many diets. This would include the artificially produced trans-fatty acids that are bad in any amount. Trans-fats are a type of fat formed when food manufacturers turn liquid oils into solid fats such as shortening and hard margarine. This prolongs the shelf life of products, but also raises LDL or “bad” cholesterol and decreases HDL or “good” cholesterol in the body. Humans are unable to break down trans fatty acids, causing them to build up in the body. Much like bacon grease clogging up the kitchen pipes, trans fats help clog up the arteries leading to the heart and brain. If product labeling says “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated” then there are trans-fats in the product. Common foods that are high in trans-fats include; cake and pancake mixes, fast foods, pies, waffles, doughnuts, cookies, muffins, crackers, cakes and even salad dressings to name a few. Minimizing and even avoiding these types of fats can have a significant effect on your body composition and overall health status.



There are fats considered to be good and essential for healthy living. Essential fatty acids (EFA's) are polyunsaturated and grouped into two families, the omega-6 EFA's and the omega-3 EFA's. The average North American diet has an abundance of omega-6 EFA's, whereas omega-3 EFA's are not as abundant. Many scientists believe that a major reason for the high incidence of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, premature aging, and some forms of cancer is the imbalance between our intake of omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids. The main sources of omega-6 fats are vegetable oils such as corn oil and soy oil. Omega-3 fats can be found in flaxseed oil and walnut oil, yielding alpha linolenic acid, while fish oils and cod liver oils yield eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), additional sources of omega-3 EFA's. The take home message here is that it is advantageous to limit our consumption of Omega-6 EFA's, and increase our consumption of Omega-3 EFA's through dietary sources and supplementation. The goal is to bring the ratio between Omega-6 EFA's and Omega-3 EFA's closer to 1:1, as opposed to the North American norm of 20:1 to 50:1.

Scientific research continues to support the positive and crucial role that omega-3 EFA's play in optimizing individual health. These benefits include but are not limited to

helping fight and prevent heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's, arthritis, diabetes and ulcers, increasing energy levels, and providing resistance to common illnesses such as the flu and cold. Hopefully this information will help dispel the myth that all fats are bad, and allow you to make healthy fat choices that are beneficial. *This article is a basic summary for educational purposes only. It is not intended, and should not be considered, as a replacement for consultation, diagnosis or treatment by a duly licensed health practitioner.*