



It's still a good idea to limit saturated fat

Has saturated fat been redeemed? Someone told me that it's not as bad for the heart as people think, but I'm skeptical.

The problem is that different studies have reached different conclusions on this question.

For example, a review of the research published in July 2011 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion concluded that diets high in saturated fat tend to increase blood cholesterol levels, particularly the "bad" LDL cholesterol, and are associated with an increased risk of heart disease. The report recommends that Americans reduce their intake of saturated fat from the current average of 11 percent of calories to less than 10 percent, or even down to 7 percent. Further, the report suggests replacing saturated fats with polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fats, rather than carbohydrates. Diets higher in carbohydrates are linked to lower HDL ("good") cholesterol and higher triglycerides — and increased heart disease risk.

However, another research review, this one published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in 2010, concluded that there's no significant evidence that saturated fat is linked to an increased risk of heart disease.

Part of the problem is that foods that contain fat — any type of fat — have a combination of different types — saturated, monounsaturated

and polyunsaturated. Even butter and lard have some mono- and polyunsaturated fats; even olive oil has some saturated fat.

Plus, there are different types of saturated fatty acids that appear to have different effects on blood cholesterol. Stearic acid, for example, is a saturated fat found in a number of foods, including dark chocolate. It appears to be neutral when it comes to heart disease risk.

Still, most authorities agree that replacing at least some of the saturated fat in our diet with unsaturated fat is a healthy choice. To do so, it might be helpful to know what the biggest contributors of saturated fat are in the average American diet:

- Regular cheese. Try cheese made from 2 percent milk instead.
- Pizza. Try ... well, try less pizza.
- Cakes, cookies, doughnuts and other grain-based sweets. Choose fruit for breakfast and dessert more often.
- Ice cream and other dairy-based desserts. Try low-fat frozen yogurt instead.
- Chicken and dishes containing chicken. Try roasted chicken (remove the skin) instead of fried.

For more details, see the "Foods and Food Components to Reduce" in the 2010 Dietary Guidelines, available at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm>.

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