

The Truth about Fat

When I think of the confusion around fat, I think of many clients I've worked with who have been taught to limit their calorie intake. They stop at the "Calorie IN-Calorie Out" theory to weight loss. Although that theory is correct, health and wellness go further looking at the nutrient density of the calorie and how it affects blood sugar levels.

Let's call her Sarah. She's an average health-conscious woman who reads a lot about nutrition. She's watching her weight and cholesterol, so for breakfast she has Egg Beaters and orange juice; lunch is salad out of a bag (which could be weeks old) with chopped deli ham or turkey (processed), topped with a low-fat dressing made from partially hydrogenated soybean oil; and dinner is usually a frozen diet entrée made from unpronounceable ingredients but hey, it's low fat and only 250 calories so it MUST be good.

Where is the food in that menu? Moreover, where is the fat? In trying to "eat well" — that is, low-fat, low-cholesterol, low-carb — Sarah is actually starving her cells of the vital fats they need to function. Eventually her metabolism will shut down and she'll be on her way toward accelerated aging and a lifetime of medication.

Even the things we read are often misleading. There was an article in a prominent health magazine one year running a comparison of the fat found in two food items: a piece of salmon vs. the Big Mac. The article went on to say that the fat level in both was virtually the same. The article failed to mention that one was actually *real food* and the other completely processed fake food. There is a Big difference in how the body will utilize those two food items!

The best fat comes from natural, preferably organic plant, fish or animal sources with little to no processing. But the differences in the types of fat and how you use them are likewise important. Here's a quick guide to healthy and unhealthy fats:

- **Monounsaturated fats** (MUFA's) come from the fruits and oils of olives, avocados, canola, peanuts, almonds and apricots. The best kinds are cold--- or pure---pressed because they are derived without heat (again, heat can create trans fats). These fats are considered to be the healthiest because they lower LDL levels and raise HDL levels.
- **Polyunsaturated fats** are a good source of the essential fatty acids that lower triglycerides and fight inflammation. The best sources are fish, such as salmon, sardines, anchovies, and herring. Good plant sources include flaxseed, canola, soybean, walnuts, and pecans. Essential fatty acids are also found in oil of evening primrose, black current, and borage. All these oils are available at natural foods stores and should be cold and raw when consumed, not used in cooking because again, with the exception of olive oil (which is higher in saturated fat), exposure to high heat and oxygen damages unsaturated fats and creates trans fatty acids. Extreme heat like that used for frying is not safe for most oils — with the exception of coconut and grapeseed oils. Olive oil can be used for sautéing but not frying.
- **Saturated fat** comes from animals and dairy products like red meat, poultry, cheese, eggs, cream and butter, and tropical fruits, like palm and coconut oils. It is solid or semi--solid at room temperature. Saturated fat remains stable at high heat, making it the preferred choice for cooking over unstable unsaturated fats. Generally speaking, the higher the proportion of saturated fat in oil, the safer it is to cook with.

Just remember, the body DOES need fat, sometimes as much as 30% of the diet. Again, it goes back to foods in their natural state.