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The Skinny on Fat

This is the second in a series of articles on food and optimal health

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You know what will make you fat? Man-made fat free food!

Fats have gotten a bad reputation over the years, and people are trying to avoid fat as much as they are a plague. Commercial food corporations have picked up on the trend and are banking on peoples' fear of fat. Most commercially produced packaged foods and snacks that boast being "REDUCED FAT" or "FAT FREE" will actually make you gain weight.

Surprised? These processed low and fat free foods are loaded with more sugar to make up for the loss of flavor, and an excess of sugar is sure to pack on a few pounds. To compound matters, you'll probably end up eating a higher quantity of the fat free version than the regular, as these foods won't curb your hunger or cravings. Fat slows down digestion, which keeps you feeling full longer.

Research has shown that people who follow fat free diets suffer from depression, fertility problems, low energy levels, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, weight gain, and have difficulties concentrating, among hosting a number of other health problems.

Fat in Our Diet

Fat provides energy. It also insulates and protects the body. Our bodies need natural and healthy fats to survive and function. Healthy fats (such as Essential Fatty Acids) play a vital role in brain and nervous system development, reproductive health, and healthy immune function. Healthy and natural fats also lower blood pressure and lower inflammation (inflammation is linked to conditions such as heart disease, arthritis, and diabetes). These fats protect cells, enable communication between cells, help absorb certain nutrients (vitamins A, D, E, K, and minerals), lower harmful LDL cholesterol, and maintain healthy skin and hair.

Healthy Fats

Fats and oils that are natural, traditional, and minimally refined and processed are your best choices. We all know that cold pressed extra virgin olive oil is a healthy choice, as it's abundant in antioxidants and lowers bad LDL cholesterol.

Unrefined, un-hydrogenated coconut oil is among the healthiest of choices, as it contains two fatty acids that fight bacteria, viruses, infections, and harmful fungi. Coconut oil contains lauric acid (also found in

human breast milk), and caprylic acid (antifungal). Coconut oil also supports the immune system, and reduces the rate of premature aging. Coconut oil can be used baking and general cooking.

Other oils and fats that should be included in your diet are those that contain Essential Fatty Acids (Omega-3 & Omega-6). Essential Fatty Acids are found in fish, avocados, nuts, seeds, and their oils (like peanut oil, sesame oil, walnut oil, flaxseed oil, etc). If using flaxseed or walnut oils, do not cook with them, because they have low smoke points (burn easily). They are best used in salads.

Foods that are high in Omega-3 fatty acids specifically are flaxseeds, walnuts, wild salmon, fresh tuna, and other cold water fatty fish.

Bad Fats

Trans fatty acids (trans fats) should be avoided all together. Trans fats, aka “partially hydrogenated” or “hydrogenated” vegetable oil are harmful fats made synthetically from altered vegetable oil. Through the process of hydrogenation, the liquid vegetable oil is chemically altered to form solid or semisolid vegetable oil. Trans fats are have zero nutritional value and are toxic to your system.

Trans fats and have been linked to reproductive problems and infertility, heart disease, an increase in “bad” LDL cholesterol, and a decrease in beneficial HDL cholesterol (HDL cholesterol helps protect against heart disease). Trans fats are also linked to dementia, cancer, type 2 diabetes, depressed immune system response, weakened bone mass, loss of healthy Omega-3 fatty acids, obesity, and clogged arteries (clogged arteries can cause strokes or heart attacks).

Food companies use trans fats mainly to extend shelf life, and because it’s cheap and easy to work with. Restaurants use them to fry foods in, because trans fat oils can be used many times without having to change the oil, making it a cheap substitute. Trans fats are found in several food products, fast food, and fried foods which are served in many restaurants.

The trans fats which are found in commercially made foods include ready made meals, packaged desserts and snacks (cakes, cake mixes, cookies, pastries, doughnuts, biscuits, candy, crackers, chips, etc.), some breakfast cereals and breakfast/energy bars, microwave popcorn, margarine, vegetable shortening, frozen foods, bottled salad dressings/marinades, and sauce mixes, among many other food products.

Be sure check the nutritional information and ingredients list on the back of packaged foods and look for terms such as “trans fats”, “hydrogenated fat/oil”, or “partially hydrogenated fat/oil”, to spot these unhealthy fats.

The fats and oils that we choose to include in our diet have a great impact on our health. Kick the junk food habit, its long term affect on your health is not worth the convenience, and you’ll end up paying a higher price if you eat processed and fast foods. Instead, choose simple, fresh and traditional foods that are naturally nutritional.

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