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Are Saturated Fats Really Dangerous For You?

By Stephen Byrnes, PhD, RNCP

This article is one part of a series of articles, which is a revision of an older article that we had previously posted on our site. You can find the original article [here](#). Additionally, please see the [rebuttal](#) to this article, by Dr. Michael Janson.

Part 6 of 15 ([Previous](#))

Myth #6: Saturated fats and dietary cholesterol cause heart disease, atherosclerosis, and/or cancer, and low-fat, low-cholesterol diets are healthier for people.

This, too, is not a specific vegetarian myth. Nevertheless, people are often urged to take up a vegetarian or vegan diet because it is believed that such diets offer protection against heart disease and cancer since they are lower or lacking in animal foods and fats.

Although it is commonly believed that saturated fats and dietary cholesterol "clog arteries" and cause heart disease, such ideas have been shown to be false by such scientists as Linus Pauling, Russell Smith, George Mann, John Yudkin, Abram Hoffer, Mary Enig, Uffe Ravnskov and other prominent researchers (49). On the contrary, studies have shown that arterial plaque is primarily composed of unsaturated fats, particularly polyunsaturated ones, and not the saturated fat of animals, palm or coconut (50).

Trans-fatty acids, as opposed to saturated fats, have been shown by researchers such as Enig, Mann and Fred Kummerow to be causative factors in accelerated atherosclerosis, coronary heart disease, cancer and other ailments (51).

Trans-fatty acids are found in such modern foods as margarine and vegetable shortening and foods made with them. Enig and her colleagues have also shown that excessive omega-6 polyunsaturated fatty acid intake from refined vegetable oils is also a major culprit behind cancer and heart disease, not

animal fats.

A recent study of thousands of Swedish women supported Enig's conclusions and data, and showed no correlation between saturated fat consumption and increased risk for breast cancer. However, the study did show, as did Enig's work, a strong link between vegetable oil intake and higher breast cancer rates (52).

The major population studies that supposedly prove the theory that animal fats and cholesterol cause heart disease actually do not upon closer inspection. The Framingham Heart Study is often cited as proof that dietary cholesterol and saturated fat intake cause heart disease and ill health. Involving about 6,000 people, the study compared two groups over several years at five-year intervals. One group consumed little cholesterol and saturated fat, while the other consumed high amounts. Surprisingly, Dr William Castelli, the study's director, said:

In Framingham, Mass., the more saturated fat one ate, the more cholesterol one ate, the more calories one ate, the lower the person's serum cholesterol ... we found that the people who ate the most cholesterol, ate the most saturated fat, [and] ate the most calories, weighed the least and were the most physically active. (53)

The Framingham data did show that subjects who had higher cholesterol levels and weighed more ran a slightly higher chance for coronary heart disease. But weight gain and serum cholesterol levels had an inverse correlation with dietary fat and cholesterol intake. In other words, there was no correlation at all (54).

In a similar vein, the US Multiple Risk Factor Intervention Trial (MRFIT), sponsored by the National Heart and Lung Institute, compared mortality rates and eating habits of 12,000+ men. Those who ate less saturated fat and cholesterol showed a slightly reduced rate of heart disease, but had an overall mortality rate much higher than the other men in the study (55).

Low-fat/cholesterol diets, therefore, are not healthier for people. Studies have shown repeatedly that such diets are associated with depression, cancer, psychological problems, fatigue, violence and suicide (56). Women with lower serum cholesterol live shorter lives than women with higher levels (57). Similar things have been found in men (58).

Children on low-fat and/or vegan diets can suffer from growth problems, failure to thrive, and learning disabilities (59). Despite this, sources from DR Benjamin Spock to the American Heart Association recommend low-fat diets for children! One can only lament the fate of those unfortunate youngsters who will be raised by unknowing parents taken in by such genocidal misinformation.

There are many health benefits to saturated fats, depending on the fat in question. Coconut oil, for example, is rich in lauric acid, a potent antifungal and antimicrobial substance. Coconut also contains appreciable amounts of caprylic acid, also an effective antifungal (60). Butter from free-range cows is rich in trace minerals, especially selenium, as well as all of the fat-soluble vitamins and beneficial fatty acids that protect against cancer and fungal infections (61).

In fact, the body needs saturated fats in order to properly utilize essential fatty acids (62). Saturated fats also lower the blood levels of the artery-damaging lipoprotein a (63); are needed for proper calcium utilization in the bones (64); stimulate the immune system (65); are the preferred food for the heart and other vital organs (66); and, along with cholesterol, add structural stability to the cell and intestinal wall

(67).

They are excellent for cooking, as they are chemically stable and do not break down under heat, unlike polyunsaturated vegetable oils. Omitting them from one's diet, then, is ill-advised.

With respect to atherosclerosis, it is always claimed that vegetarians have much lower rates of this condition than meat eaters. The International Atherosclerosis Project of 1968, however, which examined over 20,000 corpses from several countries, concluded that vegetarians had just as much atherosclerosis as meat eaters (68). Other population studies have revealed similar data. (69)

This is because atherosclerosis is largely unrelated to diet; it is a consequence of aging. There are things which can accelerate the atherosclerotic process such as excessive free radical damage to the arteries from antioxidant depletion (caused by such things as smoking, poor diet, excess polyunsaturated fatty acids in the diet, various nutritional deficiencies, drugs, etc), but this is to be distinguished from the fatty-streaking and hardening of arteries that occurs in all peoples over time.

It also does not appear that vegetarian diets protect against heart disease. A study on vegans in 1970 showed that female vegans had higher rates of death from heart disease than non-vegan females (70). A recent study showed that Indians, despite being vegetarians, have very high rates of coronary artery disease (71). High-carbohydrate/low-fat diets (which is what vegetarian diets are) can also place one at a greater risk for heart disease, diabetes, and cancer due to their hyperinsulemic effects on the body (72). Recent studies have also shown that vegetarians have higher homocysteine levels in their blood (73). Homocysteine is a known cause of heart disease. Lastly, low-fat/cholesterol diets, generally favored to either prevent or treat heart disease, do neither (74).

Studies which conclude that vegetarians are at a lower risk for heart disease are typically based on the phony markers of lower saturated fat intake, lower serum cholesterol levels and HDL/LDL ratios. Since vegetarians tend to eat less saturated fat and usually have lower serum cholesterol levels, it is concluded that they are at less risk for heart disease. Once one realizes that these measurements are not accurate predictors of proneness to heart disease, however, the supposed protection of vegetarianism melts away (75).

It should always be remembered that a number of things factor into a person getting heart disease or cancer. Instead of focusing on the phony issues of saturated fat, dietary cholesterol, and meat-eating, people should pay more attention to other more likely factors.

These would be trans-fatty acids, excessive polyunsaturated fat intake, excessive sugar intake, excessive carbohydrate intake, smoking, certain vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and obesity. These things were all conspicuously absent in the healthy traditional peoples that Dr. Price studied.

Please see next week's issue of the newsletter for our continuation of this article. To read the rebuttal of the above article, please click [here](#).



Dr. Mercola's Comments:

Many thanks to Dr. Byrnes for compiling such an outstanding resource to help us understand that excluding animal protein from one's diet can result in quite devastating health consequences.

Dr. Michael Janson is past-president of both the American College for Advancement in Medicine (ACAM) and the American Preventive Medical Association (APMA), and he founded and directed the first complementary-alternative medical center in New England, in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1976.

He is a life-long vegetarian. He is firmly committed to that lifestyle for a number of reasons which he will expand on. He has been kind enough to offer a rebuttal to Dr. Byrnes' series so we can witness the debate. I will, of course, provide my comments to both.

Not a month goes by where I don't see one or more new patients who have chosen to be a vegetarian and have suffered a loss of their health. Typically, they are able to rapidly recover their health after including animal protein back into their diet.

Let's be quite clear that I am a huge fan of eating vegetables. I believe that we should consume about one pound of vegetables a day for every fifty pounds of body weight. Ideally, these vegetables should be organic and eaten raw. One really needs a large amount of raw, uncooked food in their diet if they hope to achieve ideal health.

The simplest way to obtain this is by **juicing vegetables**.

Vegetarians also correctly identify that there are huge problems with most commercial meat sources. We were not designed to eat cattle that were raised on grain and fed hormones and antibiotics to maximize their grower's profits.

However, there are other meat sources available, such as **grass-fed beef**, organically raised poultry and wild game that do not violate these principles and are important contributors to optimal health.

In my experience though, most people are better off from a health perspective eating reasonable quantities of animal protein, even though it is less than ideal, than eating large amounts of grains.

Many have an emotional issue about killing animals for food. I have used **EFT** a number of times to help people in this area.

You can review the articles below for further details about the dangers of excluding animal protein from one's diet.

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