

FAT: THE ELUSIVE WEIGHT LOSS FACTOR

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When I advise clients to add nuts and avocados to their diets, quite often I get a surprised and incredulous look, accompanied by, “but they’re so full of fat”. I know what they’re thinking, “how can she recommend these foods when they are so full of fat and I’m trying to lose weight”?

Yes, it’s true. These foods are loaded with fat, but with the type of fat that is beneficial to your health and actually offer protective benefits not only to the heart, but to all the cells in your body. Americans are confused and have a right to be. We’ve been brain-washed into thinking that fat is the enemy, when in fact, fat is an essential nutrient and makes up a very important part of every cell in your body. It’s the type and quantity of fat that is important.

Every cell in your body has a wall around it called a cell membrane and a major portion of that membrane is lipid, or fat. Cell membranes need to remain supple so that nutrients can flow in and toxins can flow out. Polyunsaturated fats provide suppleness while saturated fats (and cholesterol) provide structural stability. Losing suppleness in the membrane causes them to become rigid and trap the waste products of cellular metabolism inside the cell contributing to the early destruction of that cell. Worse yet is the cell wall that becomes so brittle that it cracks causing cellular death. If you’re interested in slowing down the aging process, this is not something you want happening to your cells!

So, what are the types of fat we should be eating? We already know that too much saturated fat is bad. So our discussion will focus on the balance of different fats essential for optimum health. In general, Americans consume too many Omega 6 fats which are found in land animals (grain-fed) and polyunsaturated fats such as margarine and vegetable oils, and too few Omega 3 fats, found in cold-water fish, flax and hemp seeds and their oils, soybeans and walnuts. Other foods such as olive oil, avocados, almonds and other nuts and seeds, etc. contain different unsaturated fats in varying amounts. It is the combination and the variety of these unsaturated fats that produce the proper balance of fat in the diet necessary to promote good health and not hinder it. The proper ratio, or balance of Omega 6 to Omega 3 is 2:1. The standard American diet or SAD, has a ratio in the neighborhood of 15:1 in the wrong direction. Hardly a recipe for good health.

You might ask, “Isn’t olive oil a vegetable oil”? Technically, yes. But olives contain a combination of fats, mostly monounsaturated. When you crush an olive or a nut, or even a peanut (actually a legume, not a nut) the oil comes out naturally. No extraordinary means are required. Do you have any idea what they have to do to corn to get the oil out? Corn oil is a highly processed food. The corn is exposed to high heat and chemicals in order to extract the oil. Our ancestors were quite incapable of extracting oil from corn.

Back to the weight-loss issue. We know from epidemiological studies which populations are the healthiest on earth. We know for example, that the Mediterranean Diet is one of the healthiest diets and that the people from that region have significantly less cardiovascular and other degenerative diseases, even though their diets are much higher in fat than ours. There are numerous reasons for this but I would like to focus on the few that I believe are most important.

One, they consume lots of olive oil, more fish, and much less sugar and refined foods. And two, their portions are smaller. We have lost all sense of reason when it comes to portion control in this country. So yes, if you add avocados and nuts to your diet and continue eating mountains of pasta, sugar, or other refined grains known as “white poisons”, you will gain weight. Weight loss is simple in theory. If you take

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in more calories than you expend, you'll gain weight. It doesn't matter what the composition of those calories is. All excess calories get converted to fat and sent to the "depot". We all know where the depot is!

Our very ancient ancestors, and even those as early as 100,000 years ago, ate wild game when they learned to hunt and foraged for non-cultivated plants, nuts, fruits and berries and ate them when they could them. Grain arrived in our diets only about 10,000 years ago, a drop in the bucket from a genetic perspective. Vegetables and fruits contain vitamins, minerals and other phytochemicals (plant chemicals) that are beneficial for health, and although your body needs glucose (especially your brain), you can survive without ingesting carbohydrate because your body can make the glucose it needs from the carbon left behind after the metabolism of protein. I'm not saying this is the healthiest way to eat, just that your body has an incredible survival mechanism that is millions of years old.

Let's face it. Most people lose weight on high-protein diets and the reason is that they take most of the sugar (carbohydrate) out of their diets. In fact, the common theme in most high protein diets is a reduction in both calories and carbohydrates. It's just packaged differently. The animals our ancestors ate contained much less saturated fat and more Omega-3 fat because they were grass, not grain-fed. The fruit was non-cultivated and contained much less sugar. Everyone's body is different and you must find the right mix of nutrients for you. However, most people respond to a diet that has adequate protein, moderate fat with the right balance of different fats, lots of vegetables, some fruit and limited cereal grains.

On the other hand, if you want to gain weight, follow the USDA Food Pyramid, which advocates eating 6 to 11 servings of grain a day. Tell Americans to eat 6 to 11 servings of grain a day and most are not thinking of whole grains like quinoa, millet or buckwheat. They're thinking Entemann's and Wonder Bread! In fact, on a percentage basis, there is little difference in the current Food Pyramid and the USDA's Swine Fattening Formula.

What I am proposing is an exchange of nutrients in your diet. Lose the sugar and refined grains and add some good fat. And in your effort to improve your nutritional status and subsequently your health, you just might lose some weight in the process. You'll stabilize your blood sugar, feel more satisfied and lose the urge to binge. It doesn't mean that you can't eat bread, rice, pasta and potatoes ever again, but they should be eaten in limited quantities and if they are eaten, they should be whole and unrefined.

So here's some tips to put some healthy fat into your diet.

Spread almond butter on celery or a green apple for a snack instead of crackers or pretzels.

Have a small handful of nuts instead of a piece of cheese.

Eat olives with your therapeutic cocktail in the evening. They're only 15 calories each!

Eat more wild game.

Buy DHA eggs. They're higher in Omega -3's than regular eggs.

Eat guacamole with crudites.

Use tahini (ground sesame seeds) in salad dressings or hummus.

Use flax seed or nut oils on salads and steamed or roasted vegetables.

Eat sardines. They're low on the food chain (less mercury) and full of Omega 3's.

Printed in the Healthy Living Supplement, January 2002, The Minuteman Newspaper, Westport, CT.