

FAT: The Good & The Bad

“Fat Phobia”

If think you should avoid foods that contain fat and cholesterol, like meat, eggs, milk and cheese, to protect yourself from heart disease, you may be suffering from “fat phobia.”

The common belief that most healthy people need to avoid meat, dairy foods and eggs to protect against heart disease is unfounded — especially if it means missing out on the many nutrients these foods contain, including calcium, iron, zinc and vitamins B6 and B12. These nutrients often end up in short supply especially in the diets of older adults.

The Skinny on Fat

Cutting back on fat? Getting enough fat? How do you find a happy balance?

Fat is an important part of a healthful eating plan. It provides energy, fat-soluble vitamins, essential fatty acids and it makes food taste good. The tricky part is the fine line between enough and too much.

It is also important to choose the more healthful--unsaturated fats. Unsaturated fats can help lower blood cholesterol, but only when used in moderate amounts and in place of saturated fats.

To reduce your intake, switch to oils and margarines made from liquid oil. Try to limit hydrogenated oils which have more saturated fat.

Do you avoid certain foods for fear of weight gain? If so, you may be missing out on essential fatty acids and fat-soluble vitamins.

A better way to control fat is to eat foods that contain healthy fats like olive or canola oils and pay attention to your portion sizes.

Choose lean meats, low-fat dairy and plant proteins for variety and nutrition.

Olive Oil: Good for You Fat?

Plenty of research suggests that cooking with olive oil can be beneficial to your health. Its monounsaturated fat content can help lower LDL, or “bad” blood cholesterol.

Olive oil comes in a number of varieties, including virgin, light and extra virgin. All are the same in terms of fat content, either types of fat or total amounts of fat.

The difference in olive oils lies mostly in the flavor. Extra virgin olive oil is low in acid, resulting in a fruity flavor and aroma, so you don't need to use as much to enjoy the flavor. Virgin olive oil is more acidic, meaning you need to use more to get the distinct olive oil flavor. Light olive oil is lighter in color and flavor.

Whichever type of olive oil you prefer, remember they all have something else in common: They are all high in total fat and calories, so go easy on portions.