



The Heartfelt Truth on Fat

By James Goetz, DC,
and Chantea Goetz

Over the past 35 years, Americans have abashed fat, especially saturated fat, labeling it as the number one culprit of heart disease. If only this were true, we could kick back and eat fat-free Entenmann’s every day, all the way to peak health. Thank goodness for scientific evolution and modern pragmatic evidence-based research, containing many “pearls of wisdom.”

The US Surgeon General’s office prompted the low-fat diet fad back in the 1980s¹, with the release of the Seven Countries Study.² This study concluded that mortality rates due to coronary artery disease in 16 separate cohort studies were directly proportional with increased saturated fat intake. This study began to create public opinion as policies were shaped, resulting in an ultimate reduction of total saturated fat in foods found on grocery store shelves. Unfortunately for the Seven Countries Study, but fortunately for the general public, a critical analysis of this study showed numerous confounding factors and thus should have discredited the study as valid.³

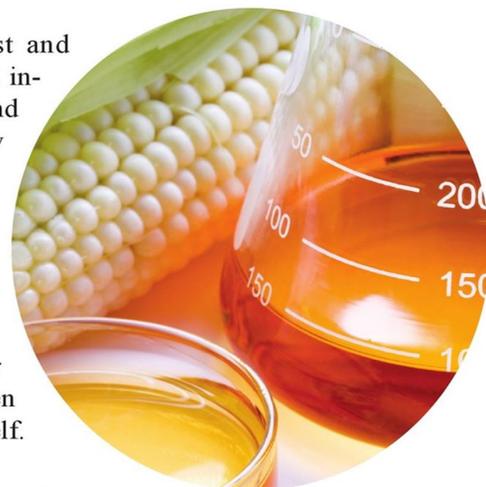
“Saturated fat in our diet may not directly cause heart disease.”⁴ This is quite profound. Thanks to the evolution of research, a study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* assessed dietary intake and blood levels of different fats to determine the corresponding risk of coronary artery disease. Some of the findings of interest include:

1. By replacing saturated fat with omega-6 polyunsaturated fat, there was no significant decrease in the risk of heart disease.
2. No direct link was found between the correlation of saturated fat blood markers and dietary fat intake.
3. The type of free circulating saturated fats is related to heart disease.

Based on these findings, it would appear that exchanging saturated fat for unsaturated fat does not decrease risk of heart disease, and that eating fat does not change saturated fat blood markers. However, the “hmm” arises with the differentiation between types of free circulating saturated fat and the relation to heart disease. Let’s explore for a moment the origin of these different types of saturated fat in our systems.

Humans have been programmed over time to crave certain foods. Foods that contain sugar release hormones in our brain, such as dopamine. Dopamine makes us feel good. As a result, when we consume sugar, we tend to feel good. With the supposedly “low fat equals heart healthy” trend, the bulk of calories in the average American’s diet come from carbohydrates, i.e., sugar.

One of the cheapest and most frequently added ingredients that has found its way onto grocery store shelves is high fructose corn syrup. It can be found in sports drinks, breads, and even hamburgers. Yes, hamburgers! Check out the ingredients in your non-Whole Foods frozen aisle and see for yourself.



When an individual consumes sugar (such as high fructose corn syrup), the liver converts the excess into palmitic acid, which is then further converted to palmitoleic acid (16:1n-7), a saturated fat. Increased palmitoleic acid levels in the blood lead to a higher incidence of metabolic syndrome.⁵

Metabolic syndrome is characterized by a number of symptoms, which include:⁶

1. Increased visceral fat
2. Dyslipidemia
3. Hypertension
4. Insulin resistance

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These symptoms are independently associated with heart disease. When combined, they make a deadly concoction. A result of metabolic syndrome is increased risk of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes mellitus.

It has been shown that there is an inverse relationship between margoric acid (17:0), a saturated fat, and coronary artery disease. Margoric acid can be found in dairy products. In 2002, the CARDIA study, as published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, stated that the consumption of 35 servings per week of dairy decreases the odds of developing metabolic syndrome by 72% more than those consuming fewer than 10 servings per week.⁷

It is beginning to appear more often that saturated fat may not be the leading culprit of heart disease because sugar, a factor that greatly affects human physiology, is not taken into consideration in a majority of studies. When subjects' carbohydrate intake is less than 50 g with an increased consumption of saturated fat, blood saturated fat levels are not increased.⁸

In a study designed to take a look at the comparison of carbohydrate restriction to low fat diets and its effect on metabolic syndrome, Jeff Volek, PhD, of the University of Connecticut, determined carbohydrate-restricted diets were shown to be superior to low-fat diets in correcting features of metabolic syndrome.⁹

The experts who stated fats were bad for you have to be right.¹ After all, they are experts, right? The blobs of yellow, artificial fat often displayed at the gym or doctors' offices that show what only one pound of fat looks like must be there to inspire us to lose fat by stopping the consumption of it. It looks gross, and thus should not be eaten, right?

Our bodies need a certain amount of calories per day in order to carry out basic physiological functions, such as breathing. This is our basal metabolic rate. Further activity, such as exercise, will require an increased bodily caloric intake. These calories can come from carbohydrates, protein, or fat. According to Volek and others, a diet consisting of an extremely low carbohydrate intake is healthy when the majority of calories come from fat. When 70% of total caloric intake is in the form of fat, there is an increase in satiety, weight loss, a decreased risk of metabolic syndrome, and relative retention of lean mass and strength.^{9,10,11} Could a former roommate, who was often mocked for eating a pound of free-range, grass-fed bacon each day, have been nutritionally right?

Where does this leave the impressionable general public? If they listen to the so-called experts from the late 1970s, they will be fat and sick. It may take some fortitude to overcome more than 35 years of nutritional mental conditioning, even though the latest research shows the means to be healthier.

While low-fat, high-carbohydrate diets can result in weight loss, this is entirely dependent on calorie restriction. This diet

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is further complicated as the hormone signals following a meal do not support satiety, and allow the return of the intense feeling of hunger.

It is true that research is an eternal quest for knowledge and ever-changing information. At times, it would appear the research has trumped general trends. A healthy body is surely part of a strong foundation for a long and happy life. Bacon anyone?

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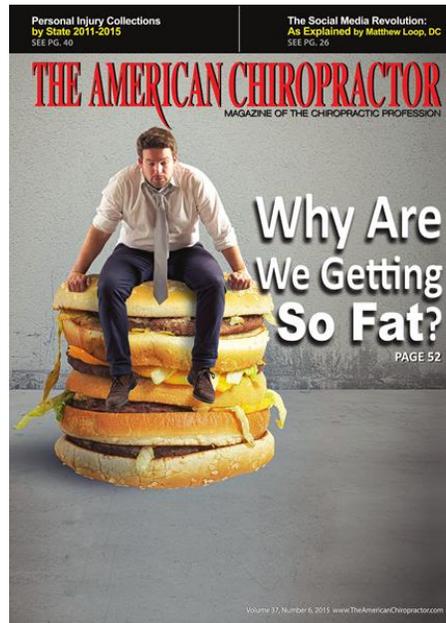
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