

Health Topics

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GOOD SATURATED FAT?

- Q. I recently heard that Coconut oil is good for you. This is a saturated fat which I have been told to eliminate. I am confused.
- A. I understand your confusion. In the 1950's there was an anti-saturated fat campaign that essentially promoted the decrease of fat consumption without distinguishing the actual type of fat to be decreased or eliminated. Essentially, all fats were portrayed as bad. This thought process has stayed with us and has pervaded our choices of commercial food sources.

It is important to realize that fat is necessary in our diet. Saturated fats are found in all types of food fats and oils but are especially abundant in hard fats. The confusion comes with the type of saturated fats. Types are distinguished by the chemical length of the fat and are known as short-chain, medium-chain and long-chain fatty acids (fats).

Long-chain fats are hard fats (solids at body temperature) and are associated with diets high in beef, mutton, pork, and dairy products. Excessive long-chain saturated fats can cause problems for our heart and arteries by making blood (platelets) sticky. This causes a decrease in the blood's ability to flow through veins. The fats can also be deposited within cells, organs, and blood vessels.

Conversely, short and medium-chain fats are used as energy and are easily digested. They can increase metabolism, increase the burning of calories, and therefore, can actually help in weight reduction. Incorporating selected fats in the diet can actually decrease appetite.

The fats that are detrimental to your health are the "trans-fats". Trans-fats are chemically altered to extend the shelf life of packaged foods. They include margarine, commercial "low cholesterol" spreads, and are found in most commercial cooking oils such as corn and canola oil. Trans-fats are the nutritional equivalent of eating plastic.

Americans generally consume too much animal protein and fat. It is important to note that fat is an integral part of even lean protein. The best fat or oil for cooking is olive oil or coconut oil. These fats are more chemically stable and actually have a nutritional value.

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