

by Dwight C. Lundell M.D. February, 2011

Does the thought of a steak, bacon and eggs, or real milk make you cringe thinking you're instantly clogging up your arteries? How many times have you seen physicians and nutritionists write "artery clogging saturated fats"? For the last 40 years the dietary instructions from governments and other authoritative bodies have told us to avoid all animal fats.

Americans took the message seriously and complied. Average fat consumption decreased, average blood cholesterol levels decreased but their rate of heart disease has continued to rise; the cost of its treatment has continued to rise. Now, in 2011 we have 24 MILLION people diagnosed with diabetes and another 65 million with pre-diabetes and an epidemic of obesity now afflicting over 65% of the population.

The evidence continues to mount that there's no benefit and probable harm from a low fat diet. Two recent examples, the Women's Health Initiative which studied 48,835 women demonstrating no benefit from a low fat diet in terms of heart disease or breast cancer. (Ref 1).

The Nurses' Health Study which has followed 90,000 female health professionals, once again demonstrated no reduction in heart disease or cancer, from a low-fat diet. (Ref 2)

Even the famous Framingham study now admits there is no association between dietary fat and heart disease and indeed the association of elevated cholesterol and heart disease is limited to a small segment of the study population. (Ref 3).

The January 2009 American Heart Journal reported that of the 137,000 people admitted to over 500 hospitals in the United States with heart attack, nearly 75% had "normal" LDL cholesterol levels, that is below 130 (see cholesterol converter for mg / dL to mmol / L conversion).

The evidence against saturated fat has always been circumstantial. That is, saturated fat was said to elevate blood cholesterol and elevated blood cholesterol was said to cause heart disease therefore saturated fat would cause heart disease. There never has been any direct evidence that saturated fat caused heart disease or even a mechanism whereby heart disease would happen.

Although there are more than a dozen types of saturated fat, humans predominantly consume three; stearic acid, palmitic acid, and lauric acid. These three fats make up 95% of the saturated fat in a piece of prime rib, a slice of bacon, a piece of chicken skin, and nearly 70% of that in butter and whole milk.

It is well established that stearic acid has no affect on cholesterol levels. In fact stearic acid is converted in the liver to oleic acid which is monounsaturated like olive oil and said to be healthy. Most scientists now consider stearic acid to be benign or potentially

beneficial. Palmitic and lauric acid do raise LDL cholesterol levels, but they also raise HDL cholesterol levels, and therefore may be beneficial.

Still worried about clogging up your arteries? The question reflects how most people today have become conditioned to eliminate fat from their diet for fear of clogging their arteries. With doctors and medical establishments recommending the elimination of saturated fat, nutritionists and other authors repeating the phrase "artery clogging saturated fats" the media certainly follows and we have formed a deep ingrained belief that saturated fat is evil and unhealthy.

In March of 2009, researchers from the U.S. National Cancer Institute reported that those whose diets contained the highest proportion of red or processed meat had a higher overall risk of death and specifically a higher risk of cancer and heart disease than those who ate the least processed or red meat. (Ref 4).

The press had a field day as the news circulated the wires quickly. Here are a few of the headlines:

"Eating red meat linked to early death, study finds"

"Study shows red meat consumption linked to higher risk of dying from cancer, heart disease"

"Death linked to too much red meat"

Dr. Michael R. Eades wrote a brilliant reply to the fault in this study and the media overreaction in a blog titled Meat and Mortality. (Ref 5).

Here is a brief excerpt:

"At the same time that this paper appeared, showing increased red meat consumption to be tied to a slight increased risk of death (and showing that those subjects eating white meat had less risk), a couple of other papers came out in the online pre-publication section of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (AJCN), arguably the world's most prestigious nutritional scientific journal.

These two AJCN papers saw the light of day at around the same time as this highly-publicized study on meat and mortality, but demonstrated the opposite results. They got no press coverage whatsoever. Which proves what I've been saying all along: the press is biased against meat in general, and especially against red meat."

I completely agree with Dr. Eades about the media bias and am surprised by authors who should know better and continue to write "artery clogging saturated fats".

The most recent definitive study of all the competent studies regarding saturated fats and heart disease called a meta-analysis and published in the AJCN January 13, 2010 shows that over a 5 to 23 year follow-up of 347,747 subjects, there is no association between the intake of saturated fat and heart disease or stroke.(Ref 6).

The bottom line is that there is no connection between the intake of saturated fat and heart disease or stroke. But there is a connection between the currently recommended high carbohydrate diet and heart disease and stroke.

So enjoy bacon and eggs and forgo the oatmeal and bagels, your LDL will come down your HDL will go up, your weight will go down and your satisfaction with your diet will go up. The low fat diet is the worst dietary advice in the last 50 years and it is the proximate cause of our epidemics of heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

Accurate knowledge cannot come from reading abstracts of articles or reporters' interpretation of the abstract.

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Ref 1. http://www.pcrm.org/health/prevmed/pdfs/modest_diet.pdf

Ref 2. <http://www.channing.harvard.edu/nhs/>

Ref 3. <http://www.framinghamheartstudy.org/>

Ref 4. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19307518>

Ref 5. <http://www.proteinpower.com/drmike/fast-food/meat-and-mortality/>

Ref 6. <http://www.ajcn.org/content/early/2010/01/13/ajcn.2009.27725.abstract>