

According to the 2015 U.S. Dietary Guidelines – Fat Is Back, Well Mostly...

Every five years beginning in 1980 the U.S. has appointed a Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee consisting of nationally recognized experts in the field of nutrition to review the current scientific and medical knowledge and make recommendations on the best food choices for Americans.

The 2015 U.S. Dietary Guidelines are soon to be published and will be in effect till 2020. They have far-reaching impact affecting food choices and food production throughout the U.S.. Included in these are school lunch and food assistance programs, governmental and military cafeterias, restaurant menus, individual choices, agricultural production, and industry food formulation.

This time around the nutrition experts have taken an astounding about face by **removing ALL restrictions on dietary fat**. Why? Because the scientific evidence is clear that healthy dietary fats, like nuts, olive oil, and fish are a very important part of the healthiest diets studied, for example, the Mediterranean diet. This is a big change and the first time since the inception of these guidelines in 1985 that the committee did not propose restricting total fat consumption.

Dr. Mozaffarian, M.D., dean, Tufts University's School of Nutrition, one of experts involved, recently said "Over the past decade, research has shown that a diet rich in healthy fats can be better for people, particularly if those fats help offset consumption of foods containing high levels of salt, sugar and refined grains."

He further states "Low-fat diets have had unintended consequences, turning people away from healthy high-fat foods and toward foods rich in added sugars, starches and refined grains. This has helped fuel the twin epidemics of obesity and diabetes in America." "For example, high-fat foods like vegetable oil, nuts and whole-milk dairy products can be very healthy, while low-fat foods like bagels, white rice, crackers and low-fat potato chips are terrible."

Dr. Mozaffarian goes on to say "We really need to sing it from the rooftops that the **low-fat diet concept is dead**."

Americans moved away from healthy whole foods like meats, whole-fat dairy, olive oil, and nuts, and moved increasingly to processed low fat starches like potato products and chips as well as refined grains like cereals, crackers, bagels, and pasta based on previous dietary guidelines that warned to limit total fat intake. Instead Americans increased refined grains, starches, and sugars, which have been shown to elevate cholesterol, blood sugar and lead to obesity and diabetes. To worsen matters, many of these "healthy" low fat foods have added sugar and salt to enhance the flavor lost by lowering the natural fat content.

Starches and refined grains, of which potato products, cereals, breads, crackers, pretzels are prime examples, are almost immediately broken down and absorbed in the GI tract and rapidly elevate blood sugar and insulin. High levels of blood sugar and insulin accelerate fat deposition, obesity, and diabetes. Insulin is clearly important in small amounts to regulate blood sugar however it is released in high amounts when we eat refined grains, starches, and sugar and this leads to rapid weight gain. Doctors have known the obesity producing effect of insulin for years as they have observed that patients requiring insulin for the treatment of diabetes commonly gain excess weight.

Okay, given all the above information, what do these new dietary guidelines mean for all of us as we make everyday food choices. Here are the take home points:

- Skip pretty everything that has “low fat” on the label.
- Enjoy frequently unsaturated fats from plants – olive oil, avocado, and nuts.
- Reduce processed grains – breads, bagels, cereals, pasta, and white rice.
- Instead, add grains in their whole form, like oatmeal, quinoa, and brown rice.
- Eat fish like salmon, halibut, sardines, cod etc..
- Enjoy, in moderation, saturated fats from meats and whole fat dairy.
- And... add multiple servings of colorful vegetables and fruits daily!

Foods that have “low fat” on the label are usually poor quality foods, just read the label. They are typically high in refined grains, salt, sugar, hydrogenated oils, and trans fats. Examples are bakery goods, breads, bagels, crackers, cakes, cookies etc. While they can be eaten on occasion they are best limited.

Fats derived from plants, which are generally unsaturated, can be and probably should be, enjoyed liberally. Not only do they taste great but they also lower our risk of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. In fact, a recent groundbreaking study showed that adding olive oil and nuts to the already healthy Mediterranean diet lowered the risk of stroke and heart attack by an additional 30%. Wow!

Processed grains are any grain like corn, wheat, and rice that is ground to flour and then manufactured into cereal, breads, bakery goods, chips etc. These rapidly raise blood sugar and insulin and act like sugar in our system. Because of this they should be eaten less, much less for most of us! Instead, grains in the whole form like steel-cut oats, brown rice, wheat berries, and quinoa are far better choices. Grains in the whole form are slowly digested and raise blood sugar and insulin very little.

Fish are rich in protein and omega three unsaturated fats and are delicious and health promoting. Adding fish twice weekly has been shown to substantially lower risk of heart attack and stroke.

Meats and whole-fat dairy products are healthy and nutritious whole foods but they are generally higher in saturated fats. While the new guidelines do not specifically limit saturated fats it is known that saturated fats have mixed health effect, some positive and some negative. On the positive side it is known that the saturated fats in whole-fat dairy lessen the risk of diabetes in men and enhance fertility in women. On the negative side saturated fats in excess increase the risk of heart disease and stroke in some individuals.

The bottom line: Fat is back! Saturated fats from meats and whole-fat dairy when included in a balanced diet with abundant vegetables, nuts, olive oil, and whole grains are both health promoting and nutritious. The unsaturated fats from plants, nuts, olive oil, and avocado are absolutely health promoting and can be eaten and enjoyed liberally!

Bon Appetite!