

Fats are bad for you! You hear it all the time. But did you know that there are “good” fats that are essential for good health.

I think we can all agree that the consumption of fried foods is unhealthy. They have been linked to heart disease, cardiovascular disease, and gall bladder disease to name just a few of the negative health consequences. The American public is becoming increasingly aware of the dangers due to the public health education that has been done in this area. Despite this public knowledge, one in four Americans eats in a fast food restaurant every day. In fact, it is reported that MacDonalD’s alone feeds approximately 46 million people a day. That is more people than the population of Spain. They also represent 43% of the US fast food market.

The least healthy of these “bad” fats are the saturated fats. These fats are also called trans fats and are a processed fat. These fats have been chemically altered to achieve this trans state and are used in processed foods. They are listed on the labels as “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated oils.” Consumers can easily detect them by simply looking at food labels.

So it’s common knowledge that these fat laden fast foods are bad for you, but what kind of health issues are associated with them? There are plenty. First there is obesity; which in turn can lead to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, gall bladder disease, insulin resistance, breathing difficulties, sleep apnea, and osteoarthritis. These fatty diets have also been linked to cancers, including breast, colon, and prostate. Additionally, these high fat foods can cause headache, PMS, and impair alertness.

Certain foods are very high in these hydrogenated or saturated fats. These include almost all processed foods, most pre-packaged foods, most foods in fast food restaurants, and even some foods prepared in upscale restaurants. Meats and dairy products are also very high in saturated fats. However, it is important not to construe all fats and oils as “bad.” There are also “good” fats and oils that are essential to healthy living. In fact, a healthy adult diet should contain approximately five percent of the essential fats and a child’s healthy diet should contain up to 20 percent of “good” fats.

Essential fatty acids are those fats the body needs to survive but cannot manufacture on its own. These fats must be obtained in the diet. They are important for proper nervous system development and function, proper immune system function, and for the prevention of certain diseases, and in the moderation of inflammation. These fats are referred to as omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Canola oil, flaxseed oil, cold-water fish, or fish oil, all contain omega-3 fatty acids. Primrose oil and black currant seed oil contains omega-6 fatty acids. These oils can also be obtained in purified form in perles as well as in their whole food forms. A perle is like a capsule, only it contains liquid rather than a powder.

A very basic example of the difference between the saturated fats and the omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids and their health effects on the body is seen in how they are metabolized. Fats are metabolized into prostaglandins. There are three primary

prostaglandins: PG-1, PG-2, and PG-3. Saturated fats metabolize into PG-2 which causes inflammation in the body. Omega-6 fats metabolizes to PG-1 and omega-3 fats metabolize to PG-3 which have anti-inflammatory properties and protect the body. This simple example shows the dramatic difference between the two types of fats.

To make matters even more complicated it appears that the production of PG-1, which remember is important in preventing inflammation, is blocked by high levels of PG-2; which occurs in diets high in saturated and trans fats or with the excess use of alcohol. Aspirin, steroids, anti-inflammatory medications, and some food additives have also been shown to block PG-1 formation.

It is important to maintain high dietary levels of these “good” and essential fats. One of the best sources for these fats is cold water fish oils. The best source is obviously the whole food – fresh fish. You can, however, get these oils in the form of a supplement.

Make sure that the fish oil is fresh and from a reputable source. It is unwise to buy no name brands of these oils as quality is perhaps even more important than quantity when taking these supplements. Oils that are not pure can contain unhealthy contaminants. They can also go rancid and have a deleterious effect on health. Always check the bottle for an expiration date. If there isn't one, don't buy it.

Fats can be good for you. With just a little effort and some wise choices you can dramatically reduce the harmful fats in your diet and replace them with healthy ones. The payoff will be lower weight, clearer skin, a better mental outlook, a brighter attitude, and much better health.

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