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# Zest for Life

Disclaimer: I am not a qualified health practitioner. You should always consult a qualified health practitioner if you are sick. Opinions expressed on this website are my own or come from my own experience or research

## Fats

Healthy fats in the form of essential fatty acids are critical to our body's structure and function.

1. Without fat, we can't absorb some vitamins and minerals eg, vitamins A, D, E and K.
2. It is needed for building cell membranes,
3. It is needed for the sheath surrounding nerves,
4. It is essential for blood clotting, muscle movement, inflammation and brain function (over 70% of our brains are made of fat).

It can, therefore, be surmised that a very low-fat diet would actually be harmful.

Polyunsaturated fats eg. walnuts, sunflower seeds, flax seeds/oil, safflower oil and monounsaturated fats eg. olive oil, avacadoes, almonds, brazils are healthy sources of fat but even saturated fat such as butter and the fat found in red meats, instead of being harmful to health is now deemed to have health benefits.

A recent paper published in the American Journal of Cardiology on June 27, 2020 actually admits that the long-standing nutritional guideline to limit saturated fat has been incorrect. Here is an abstract from the article:-

*"The recommendation to limit dietary saturated fatty acid (SFA) intake has persisted despite mounting evidence to the contrary. Most recent meta-analyses of randomized trials and observational studies found no beneficial effects of reducing SFA intake on cardiovascular disease (CVD) and total mortality, and instead found protective effects against stroke.*

*Although SFAs increase low-density lipoprotein (LDL)-cholesterol, in most individuals, this is not due to increasing levels of small, dense LDL particles, but rather larger LDL which are much less strongly related to CVD risk.*

*It is also apparent that the health effects of foods cannot be predicted by their content in any nutrient group, without considering the overall macronutrient distribution.*

*Whole-fat dairy, unprocessed meat, eggs and dark chocolate are SFA-rich foods with a complex matrix that are not associated with increased risk of CVD. The totality of available evidence does not support further limiting the intake of such foods."*

This has also been reported in the BMJ (British Medical Journal).

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So, if you thought that fat affects your cholesterol, it seems that it doesn't or not much. In fact, data shows that 2/3 of people admitted to hospital with acute myocardial infarction have completely normal cholesterol levels.

Don't get me wrong, fats can be harmful, but it is important to be specific. It is trans fats and highly refined and/or heated polyunsaturated vegetable oils (PUFAs) with damaged Omega 6 fatty acids that are harmful. Also hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated fats. Fat hydrogenation is a chemical process to transform cheap vegetable oils into solid fats and spreads ie margarine and spreads.

So, processed/refined cooking oils and margarine and spreads are to be avoided at all costs as well as ready-made meals and snacks that tend to be high in these fats as well.

But this does not mean you should go out and load up on cheese, butter, olive oil, coconut oil etc. Remember that fat is energy dense; per gram it has twice the energy of carbohydrate and protein. A little goes a long way.

It is also worth noting that you should use the correct oil for purpose. For cooking you should use ghee or virgin coconut oil because it has a high flash or burning point that can handle the heat. Virgin olive oil has a low flashpoint and high heat will destroy not only its delicate flavour and antioxidants but also produce bitterness and carcinogenic hydrocarbons. Used in salads dressings or a warm sauce, it retains all its flavour and health benefits.

So, there are 2 types of essential fatty acids that our body needs – Omega 3 and Omega 6. Unfortunately, our diet has tended to be high in omega 6 with refined, processed oils, meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts and seeds.

Focussing on Omega 3 fatty acids will help bring things back into balance. Good sources of Omega 3 include oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring etc as well as plant sources such as chia seeds, hemp seeds, brussel sprouts, walnuts, flax seeds.

It should be noted that the Omega 3 fatty acid ALA that is derived from plant sources is biologically inactive and your body must convert it to the biologically active forms of EPA or DHA. Unfortunately, this process is inefficient which makes plant sources a poor source of Omega 3s. Oily fish, on the other hand is the best source of the biologically active EPA and DHA Omega 3 fatty acids.

**Cholesterol:** it is now known that dietary cholesterol has little effect on blood cholesterol - our bodies make its own cholesterol. In fact, cholesterol is essential for our bodies' functions from digestion to hormone production. Plant sterols and stanols, when eaten in large quantities, can reduce cholesterol in the same way that oats can reduce cholesterol by blocking the re-absorption of cholesterol released in the gut for digestion.

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## References

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<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-truth-about-fats-bad-and-good>

### Sources of Omega 3

[https://bengreenfieldfitness.com/article/supplements-articles/omega-3-benefits/?utm\\_source=activecampaign&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=podcast&utm\\_content=omega&vgo\\_ee=FdL1kTKiNJ41NI508xeqgUzkASpiHornD%2Fz2wZTd1jg%3D](https://bengreenfieldfitness.com/article/supplements-articles/omega-3-benefits/?utm_source=activecampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=podcast&utm_content=omega&vgo_ee=FdL1kTKiNJ41NI508xeqgUzkASpiHornD%2Fz2wZTd1jg%3D)

### Plant sources of Omega 3

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/7-plant-sources-of-omega-3s>

American College of Cardiology – Saturated Fat Guidelines may be incorrect

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### BMJ article on cholesterol

<https://www.bmj.com/company/newsroom/doubt-cast-on-wisdom-of-targeting-bad-cholesterol-to-curb-heart-disease-risk/>

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/08/200803184143.htm>