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Fat – It is Good For You!

If you haven't already heard the news, fat is back and I'm not talking about belly fat or the wobbly bits of fat in-between our thighs. What I'm talking about is *dietary* fat – which has been something of a black sheep in the macronutrient family these past thirty years.

You see, between the years 1977 and 1982, dietary guidelines (i.e. the government) told us to eat more low-fat foods. They claimed that a diet low in fat would decrease our chances of heart disease and certain cancers. Unfortunately, instead of eating whole, lower fat foods like fruits and vegetables, we ate more “food-like products”, such as artificially made low-fat yogurt, cheeses, candies, crackers and whatever else was advertised as “low-fat”.

While these “food-like products” are low in fat, the manufacturers had to put something else in them to replace that fat and make them taste good - otherwise they would be out of business. So they pumped these food-like products full of sugar, salt and/or other chemicals. Business was good. So good, in fact, that the manufacturers decided to take it up a notch around the mid-1970's. They found that, yes, by replacing fat with sugar and marketing their new foods as “low in fat” they were sure to have a hit on their hands, but the problem was that they found sugar a little too costly for their products. No problem, they just created a cheaper alternative - high-fructose corn syrup. This made their bottom line even rosier while the unsuspecting and consuming public knew no different - when we thought we were eating healthy we were in fact doing quite the opposite.

These food-like products (notice I don't call them foods, because they're not) are still littering the aisle ways of our local grocery store and are about as nutritious as a piece of paper and chalked full of stuff our bodies are not accustomed to metabolizing. But we love the taste and the manufacturers love marketing all their low-fat wares to us, so we buy and we eat.

And eat them we do. In fact, as of 2004, over 58% of us were classified as overweight or obese (*Stats Canada 2004*) by our government. That's an 18% increase from the years 1970 to 1972 – which was about the same time we were told to eat more low-fat foods because they were better for us.

Let's face it, our bodies need fat to function properly. Besides being an energy source (nine calories per gram), fat is a nutrient used in the production of cell membranes, as well as in several hormone-like compounds called eicosanoids (throw that word around at your next party and you'll sound brilliant!). These compounds help regulate blood pressure, heart rate, blood

vessel constriction, blood clotting and the nervous system. Trust me - high-fructose corn syrup does not do any of these.

In addition, dietary fat carries fat-soluble vitamins — vitamins A, D, E and K — from your food into your body. Fat also helps maintain healthy hair and skin, protects vital organs, keeps your body insulated, and provides a sense of satiety after meals (fullness).

Back in 2001, a huge bombshell was released in *The Journal of the American College of Nutrition*. Scientists there finally admitted that “it is now recognized that the low-fat campaign has been based on little scientific evidence and may have caused unintended health consequences”. They continued on to say that they also found very little association between poly-unsaturated fats and an increase in coronary heart disease. So, contrary to popular belief, fat does not cause (and never has) heart disease, and by avoiding fats all these years we may have caused ourselves more harm than good. Wow, thanks for leading us astray gang.

To make matters worse for the no-fat propaganda people, in 2006 news was released that a low-fat diet does not protect against cancer either, like we were once told it does. The large-scale U.S.-funded Women’s Health Initiative found that this link never existed, nor could they confirm a link between increased fat in one’s diet and an increased risk of coronary heart disease.

There is no doubt that we need to let go of our fat-phobia and start introducing this nutrient back onto our plates. But not just any ol’ fat will do. It is still widely recognized, and proven, that trans-fat should be avoided at all costs. It is also recommended that our total caloric intake of fat not exceed 30% of our daily calories. This will be high for a lot of us. Most of the dietary consultations that I have been doing with people over the years have found that they are lucky if 10-15% of their total calories is fat, with carbohydrates taking over the other 10-15%.

Don’t think, either, that fat will make you fat. Recently, I had to shed a couple of pounds for a photo shoot and to accomplish that I actually increased my fat intake. After three weeks of the new diet I am happy to say the photos turned out brilliantly. Try these easy tips to allow fat and, more importantly, real food back into your diet.

- Have a source of essential fatty acids (EFA) daily. I recommend ground sprouted chia seeds mixed in your oatmeal or smoothie, but cold water fish, fish oil, flax seed and flax seed oil are also great sources.
- Go nuts! Try to make a habit of having a ¼ cup of mixed unsalted nuts for your afternoon snack. Make sure your mixture includes walnuts, almonds, and pumpkin seeds.
- Use organic butter instead of margarine. Butter is real, and something the body knows how to process. It also contains key nutritional ingredients including antioxidants which can help to offset free radical damage to cells. It is a source of vitamin D and calcium, as well as selenium. Another key component, conjugated linoleic acid, is thought to help maintain lean body mass, prevent weight gain, and may reduce the risk of certain types

of cancer. The fats found in butter also help to aid in the absorption of certain vitamins and minerals consumed in the diet.

- Use olive oil, canola oil or coconut oil.
- Use your common sense – when increasing the fat in your diet use real and clean food sources – and sorry, deep-fried fish and chips are not what I have in mind.