

The Skinny on FAT



Story | ANGELA AMBROSE

For decades, we've been told big fat lies: if you want to lose weight, don't eat fat. But the latest research shows the opposite might be true. Adding healthy fats to your diet might help prevent overeating, promote better brain function and improve your overall health.

A recent study financed by the National Institutes of Health showed that subjects who ate a low-carb diet lost more weight and had higher good (HDL) cholesterol than those on a low-fat diet. "A big misconception is that eating fat causes fat storage on the body, but consuming fat can actually help your body burn more fat," Ali Miller, registered dietitian and owner of Naturally Nourished in Houston, says.

Good fat sources include heart-healthy unsaturated fats,

such as those found in olive or sesame oil, nuts, flaxseed, avocado and salmon. Now even saturated fat is an acceptable part of a healthy diet when it comes from sources such as coconut oil, grass-fed beef and dairy.

"Certain fats such as coconut oil can actually boost metabolism by creating a body temperature shift that burns more calories," Miller says. The one type of fat to avoid is trans fat, which is heavily processed and frequently found in cookies, chips and fried foods.

Fat-free foods often contain

additional sugar, which causes a sharp spike in your blood sugar level, promoting the storage of extra calories (as fat!). Combining healthy fat with carbohydrates helps regulate blood sugar levels. Miller suggests eating grapes with cheddar cubes or dipping apple slices in nut butter.

Another important benefit of consuming fat is the sensation of fullness and satiety it provides. When eating fat, your body releases a hormone called leptin, which inhibits feelings of hunger. So, for example, eating a handful of walnuts instead of low-fat crackers can help you feel satisfied

longer and prevent overeating.

Fats also improve brain function. "We see a higher risk for Alzheimer's and dementia with low-fat diets," Miller says. "We know that the brain consists of about 80 percent fat—so we really need essential fats to help with cognitive processing and memory."

Modern research is showing us that consumption of fat is actually good for us, as long as we are choosing our fat sources wisely. "We're no longer looking for reduced-fat salad dressings," Miller says. "It's about picking a beneficial fat." *

DID YOU KNOW ?

When combined with other foods, fat can help your body absorb more antioxidants and fat-soluble nutrients such as vitamins A, D, E and K. So, instead of eating steamed broccoli or a plain baked sweet potato, Miller suggests roasting them in the oven and adding olive, sesame or coconut oil.