Fat Chance!

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Hard on the heels of the bacon and red meat causes cancer scare scientists in the UK have found that cooking with vegetable oils like sunflower oil releases toxic chemicals called aldehydes which increase the risk of cancer, heart disease and dementia.

The healthiest oil to cook with was coconut oil, butter was second and olive oil third.

How can this be? We have been told saturated fats are bad.

You might expect that major recommendations about health and diet (like the low fat diet) would be rigorously tested and assessed before being promoted to the public.

Sadly you would be wrong. An absolutely damning review published in the BMJ (British Medical Journal) found that the introduction of low fat dietary recommendations had absolutely NO basis.

Let me repeat this. There was never any scientific basis to recommend a low fat diet. To quote the researchers; “Dietary recommendations were introduced…in the absence of supporting evidence from randomised control trials”.

The best they could muster were studies on 2647 males where one group had lower cholesterol. But, and it is a big but, there was no difference in rates of heart disease or all cause mortality between the lower and higher cholesterol groups.

A 1970’s study, which became very influential, showed a reduction in cholesterol levels in one group of men eating a low fat diet compared to a group eating a “normal” 1970’s diet. Yet the low fat group had a higher death rate. The total numbers were small but the study was used as a basis to promote the low fat diet as a way to lower cholesterol and reduce heart disease.

To quote Milton Friedman “One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results”.

It has not been a time for supporters of the fat is bad mantra. Last year Time magazine ran a cover story titled “Eat butter - Scientists labeled fat the enemy. Why they were wrong”.

This was prescient. Earlier this year the US Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee announced that cholesterol was no longer a “nutrient of concern”. It has also removed any upper restriction on how much fat is part of a healthy diet.

The guidelines on diet come out every five years based on a review of the scientific literature. It states,“Reducing total fat (replacing total fat with overall carbohydrates) does not lower CVD [cardiovascular disease] risk…Dietary advice should put the emphasis on optimizing types of dietary fat and not reducing total fat.”

In other words low fat foods where fats are replaced by sugars are out!

Studies have consistently showed no correlation between fats in the diet and any form of disease. The only type of diet consistently shown to have a positive impact is the Mediterranean diet.

The Journal of the American Medical association noted, “Based on years of inaccurate messages about total fat, a 2014 Gallup poll shows that a majority of US residents are still actively trying to avoid fat while eating far too many refined carbohydrates”.

In the quote above you can easily substitute residents of Australia. New Australian guidelines were released earlier this year but they clung to the fat is bad story.

Yet the JAMA author has a different view; “It is time for the US Department of Agriculture and Department of Health and Human Services to develop the proper signage, public health messages, and other educational efforts to help people understand that limiting total fat does not produce any meaningful health benefits and that increasing healthful fats, including more than 35% of calories, has documented health benefits”.

Pete Evans has attracted much opprobrium from the nutritional establishment for pretty much doing this. Whilst full Paleo may be extreme, a diet higher in protein and fats and lower in carbohydrates, especially grains and refined carbohydrates leaves most people feeling better and with more energy.

Generally this type of diet leads to weight loss. In simplest terms this is because the body releases less insulin on a low carb diet. Insulin promotes fat storage and inhibits fat burning. Plus we reach insulin resistance if we flog the insulin system too hard for too long. This is the precursor to type two diabetes, shown in a ten-year study, in 150 countries to be due to refined carbohydrate consumption and NOT obesity.

You might wonder why there has been little coverage of all this significant information. Reputations and dollars are at stake.

In the totality of human history, the low fat diet will be seen as perhaps the worst fad diet. Dietary advice from “authorities” is in my view permanently tarnished. Rather than ask authorities, we should ask our grandparents what they ate when they were young. It was real, not manufactured food. Until recently it had been growing somewhere or moving around. It was eaten the day it was cooked. It went off if not eaten in a few days. It did not come in boxes with a use by date and labels with health claims.

These simple guidelines are easy and free. Follow them.

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