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The Bottom Line on the Saturated Fat Debate

Finishing up this look at saturated fat and the Dietary Guidelines, those who oppose the limit on saturated fat argue that saturated fat is not related to cardiovascular disease. They go on to argue that if fat is limited, carbohydrates will take their place—and high carbohydrate intake is the real cause of obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.

Before I go any further, if you're reading this at home, write down three of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines that you remember. How about two? One? Exactly. Unless you've just taken a course in healthier eating, you don't know what the current guidelines say. The premise that the opponents use, including Ms. Teicholz, as to why the limits on saturated fats is so important is that it will impact Americans in a negative way because government, nutritional, and healthcare policies will dictate what we should eat.

No, they won't.

I've written about the original Dietary Guidelines established in 1977; that and every iteration of it has been repeatedly ignored by the public. They have eaten highly refined carbohydrates instead of the complex carbs from vegetables, fruits, and whole grains that were and still are recommended. They continue to eat too much fat. Why would anyone believe that this document will affect anyone in any way? It's not going to change industry. Companies that make refined foods are going to continue to do so. Farmers who grow beef and pork will continue to do so. And people who oppose the Dietary Guidelines will do so no matter whether the guidelines recommend a vegan diet or a ketogenic diet.

The scientists and experts will continue to disagree. Some will cite research that shows saturated fat is bad and others will cite research that it's not. It's a circular argument that will never be resolved. But the primary problem is that they're not asking the right question. They're looking at this food ingredient or that as though it matters. It doesn't for the most part.



The Bottom Line

The real problem is that we eat way too much—that's what causes the current uptick in food-related diseases: obesity, heart disease, cancer, and others. Too much food is bad no matter what you eat. Whether we eat too much fat or too many refined carbohydrates, there's little difference in the effect on our health because we just plain eat too much.

As I've said many times, if you like a low-fat diet, go with it. If you like a high-fat diet, fine. As long as you eat your vegetables and don't overeat, it just doesn't matter. Find what works for you and stick with it. I favor fewer refined carbohydrates and more quality protein, what I call a semi-ketogenic diet. Whatever does it for you, just remember six words: Eat less. Eat better. Move more.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet



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