**The Skinny on Fats**

**What is fat?** It is a primary source of fuel in the body

**What is fat good for?** Source of energy and transports nutrients to the brain

**Explain the Different types of fats**

* Monounsaturated fat. A healthy fat found in foods such as nuts, olive oil, and avocados.
* Polyunsaturated fat. A fat found in foods such as walnuts, salmon, and, soybean oil. Polyunsaturated fats provide essential fatty acids such as omega-3s and omega-6s to your diet.
* Saturated fat. Usually solid at room temperature, saturated fats are found in animal products such as meat and milk, as well as in coconut and palm oil. Saturated fat is often used in foods to prevent rancidity and off flavors. It has been linked to higher cholesterol levels. Saturated fat will often increase LDL but also increase the “good” HDL. Whereas, in trans fats (see next bullet point), LDL is increased and HDL is decreased (not a good combination).
* Trans fat. The most dangerous type of fat due to the fact that it’s a liquid that is manufactured to be solid at room temperature. The words you would find on a food label might include “hydrogenated” or “partially-hydrogenated.” Companies do this to prolong the shelf life of the food and increase the flavor and palatability of the food. Processed foods such as coffee creamers, pastries, margarine, chips, cookies, crackers, granola bars, and many other foods with long shelf-life have trans fats. Trans fats clog arteries which can lead to heart attack and stroke and increase cholesterol. It’s also been linked to diabetes.

**What types of fats are best for me?** The majority of your fat consumption should come from monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats. A smaller percentage should come from saturated fats.

That would mean you would eat primarily a variety of nuts, olive oil, avocado, salmon, flaxseed, chia seeds, etc. Coconut oil or animal fat should be consumed to a lesser degree, according to the American Heart Association

**How much fat should I eat?** Staying consistent with my variety and moderation mentality, the research points to 30% or less of your diet consisting of fat.

This would mean if you eat 1,600 calories per day, less than 53 grams of fat

2,200 calories per day, less than 73 grams of fat

Saturated fat should be less than 10% of your diet

Trans fats should be avoided

Tips for healthy fat consumption:

* Make the majority of your fat from sources such as nuts and seeds. Flax and chia seeds are high in omega 3s and so are emphasized, but include a variety and be moderate
* Incorporate heart-healthy salmon, mackerel, etc. instead of meat about 2 times per week
* Avoid all trans fats. Look at labels and do not buy foods with “partially hydrogenated” or “hydrogenated” in the list of ingredients
* More of your oil use should come from oil that is in liquid form instead of solid fats (according to research, but coconut oil can be used moderately)
* Avoid vegetable oils and canola oils. Minimize butter and margarine. Strictly avoid any butter or margarine substitute that has an ingredient list with chemicals listed

What about coconut oil or MCTs?

Coconut oil has gone through a wild health craze like most fads in the health world. Studies have supported coconut oil on the one hand and other studies have discounted the benefits. Coconut oil has been part of the diet of many cultures for centuries. These cultures also tend to eat mostly fruits and vegetables along with their coconut (not as much in the form of oil) and so their health benefits need to be seen within that context. There are many benefits of coconut oil and yet too much is still not advised, in my opinion.

MCTs have also been pushed by some in the health industry. MCTs are Medium-chain Triglycerides. MCTs do not occur naturally and so need to be manufactured to extract the portions of fats that are in MCTs. The chemical structure is altered which also affects how we digest these fats. MCTs are often used to treat certain medical problems such as malnutrition or in IV-feedings of ill patients. They made a surge in the health care industry because they were touted to increase energy and help with weight loss. The claim is that they bypass the liver while other oils go through the liver. The evidence about MCTs has been refuted by some and supported by others. As I usually find in the world of health, a little is good, a lot is not good. There are some benefits to coconut oil or MCTs but they are not the magic cure and they should not be the bulk of our diets.

I’m sure that studies will continue to be done either supporting or negating the benefits of coconut oil and MCTs. This is true of most health information. My goal is to stay clear and balanced: common sense says to be moderate and use variety. Small amounts are beneficial, large amounts are likely to cause other problems.

Omega 6s vs Omega 3s

Omega 6 fatty acids are in many of the foods we eat, mainly vegetable and corn oils and all the products that contain them (crackers, chips, breads, cookies, cakes, pastries, etc) . Omega 6s cause inflammation in our bodies. Inflammation in our bodies, in a chronic state, is a main culprit for diseases of all kinds including diabetes, heart disease, autoimmune disease, and some would say is the root of all disease and cancer.

Omega 3s are harder to get into our diets. Omega 3s tend to decrease inflammation in our bodies and because of that can help reduce disease and weight issues. Omega 3s are found in salmon, flaxseed, chia seed, walnuts, green leafy vegetables, hemp, etc. and when incorporated into our diets will help balance out all the Omega 6s we eat.

**Top sources of fats**

**Monounsaturated** **Polyunsaturated**  **Saturated**

Olive oil Nuts Coconut oil

Avocado oil Salmon Palm oil (not preferred)

Flaxseed oil Flaxseed

**Omega 3s**

Fish Nuts (walnuts especially) Flaxseed

Hemp Chia seed

**AVOID**

Canola oil

Corn oil

Vegetable oil

Margarine

Hydrogenated/partially hydrogenated oils

Trans fats

Cottonseed Oil