

High Amounts of Saturated Fats Increase Heart Disease Risk



According to a new study appearing in *The BMJ*, people who consume high amounts of four major saturated fatty acids — found in red meat, butter, lard, dairy fat and palm oil — may have greater risk of coronary heart disease. While previous studies have shown that individual saturated fatty acids have different effects on blood lipids, not much is known about associations between individual saturated fatty acid intake and coronary heart disease risk.

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The new study, led by researchers at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, indicated that a higher intake of these widely used major saturated fatty acids — lauric acid, palmitic acid, myristic acid, and stearic acid — was associated with a 24 percent increased relative risk of coronary heart disease.

Interestingly, the researchers also found that replacing these fats with healthier fats, whole grains, and plant proteins could reduce coronary heart disease risk. They note that replacing just one percent of daily consumption of these fatty acids with equivalent calories from polyunsaturated fats, monounsaturated fats, plant proteins, or whole grain carbohydrates, may help reduce relative coronary heart disease risk by 4-8 percent.

Considering that individual saturated fatty acids share the same food sources (i.e., red meat, dairy, butter, lard, and palm oil), the authors explain, it is impractical to differentiate the types of saturated fatty acids in making dietary recommendations, an idea that some researchers have suggested.

"Replacing sources of saturated fat in our diets with unsaturated fats is one of the easiest ways to reduce our risk of heart disease," said Walter Willett, professor of epidemiology and nutrition, who is a member of the research team.

The Harvard team reviewed data from 73,147 women involved in the Nurses' Health Study between 1984 and 2012, and 42,635 men who were in the Health Professionals Follow-up Study between 1986 and 2010. Participants reported their diet and health status on questionnaires completed every four years.

Their findings strongly corroborate what the current USDA Dietary Guidelines recommend, according to senior author Qi Sun, assistant professor in the Department of Nutrition. "This includes reducing saturated fat intake to no more than 10 percent of total calories, and eating an overall healthful diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, vegetable cooking oils rich in polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats, nuts, legumes, fish, and low-fat dairy."

Source: [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#)

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