

# Eating fat is good for you

Dietitians and nutritionists agree with your grandmother: 'Ghee' and oil are good for vitamin absorption as well as the muscular and skeletal systems

By SHWETA TANEJA

Think you're living healthy by avoiding fats? Think again. The 2015 dietary guidelines issued by a panel of nutritionists in the US for the agriculture department earlier this year have recommended adding an egg or two in your everyday diet to keep type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease at bay. Fat, the recommendation proves, is suddenly fashionable.

"Our body needs a certain amount of fat to function since it can't make triglycerides, cholesterol and other essential fatty acids on its own," says Seema Singh, chief clinical nutritionist and head of department, Fortis Hospital, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi. The breakdown of fats provides energy, helps in growth, immunity, reproduction, and protects organs. Fat also helps proteins do their job and stores certain fat-soluble vitamins like A, D, E and K, explains Singh. The National Institute of Nutrition and the Indian Council of Medical Research recommend an equal ratio of saturated fatty acid (SFA), monounsaturated fatty acid (Mufa), and polyunsaturated fatty acid (Pufa) in oil. "Rotate vegetable oils, *ghee* (clarified butter) and butter in your daily diet and consume two teaspoons every day if you're an adult with ideal body weight," says Singh.

For those who like adding a dollop of *ghee* to their *rotis*, there's more news. A paper published in 2014 in the journal *Annals Of Internal Medicine*, which analysed existing cohort studies and randomized trials on coronary risk and fatty acid intake, found no evidence of a direct relation between saturated fats and cardiovascular disease. Another study, published in the *Open Heart* journal in February, found that diet guidelines which have been in force in the US and UK for over 20 years now, recommending people reduce dietary fat consumption to 30% and saturated fat content to 10% to cut the risk of heart disease and death, are not based on scientific evidence.

"I have never recommended fat-free diets for any patient," says Suvarna Pathak, a dietitian and nutritionist coordinator at Mumbai's Nanavati Super Speciality Hospital who has been providing diets to patients for 23 years. "Fat is important for smooth metabolism, vitamin absorption, lubrication of joints, the working of our muscular, skeletal and organic systems, absorption of vitamin D and strengthening of muscles and bones. Even the functioning of heart muscles needs fats," she adds. In Pathak's experience, even patients with cardiovascular or liver disorders shouldn't be barred from fats, for these help essential body functions. She recommends 10-15% of the total calories consumed every day should come from fat sources like eggs, nuts, oil, fish and cheese.

Of course, there's fat and there's bad fat. Trans fat, made when natural-occurring fat sources are processed, give nutritionists the heebie-jeebies. "Trans fats and refined oils, and oils that are polyunsaturated like sunflower, are refined through chemical processes, which make them rancid and toxic if used at higher smoke points," explains Madhuri Ruia, a *Mint* columnist and fitness and nutrition professional who heads Integym in Mumbai. Fat is good if had from natural sources, she says.

## Avocado

This fruit is high in Mufa, a heart-healthy fatty acid, dietary fibre and phytochemicals, according to a study published in the *Nutrition* journal in 2013.

"This fruit has 75% fat, but it is Mufa," says Mumbai-based dietitian and sports nutritionist Deepshikha Agarwal. She recommends having it once a week. "Add a slice to a sandwich, salad, or even desserts," she says.

## 'Ghee'

*Ghee* made from cow's milk has been used in India as an essential Ayurvedic therapeutic agent and a cooking oil.

According to a paper by the National Dairy Research Institute in Karnal, published in the *Indian Journal Of Medical Research* in 2012, cow *ghee* decreases the activation of cancer-causing carcinogens in the liver. "*Ghee* decreased the activities of cytochrome P450 (CYP) enzymes, CYP1A1, CYP1A2, CYP1B1 and CYP2B1, respon-

sible for activation of carcinogen in liver," the study states.

"If used in moderation, it prevents cardiac disease and reduces bad cholesterol," says Singh. Around 5-10g of *ghee* every day provides not only saturated fat but also vitamin A, boosts libido, and results in brighter skin and a healthy gut. "Have one teaspoon daily to keep up your energy and fat requirements," says Divya Choudhary, chief dietitian, Max Super Speciality Hospital, Shalimar Bagh, New Delhi.

## Egg

"Eggs are high in Mufa and Pufa, which are cardio-protective fats," says Agarwal. They are also rich in vitamin B12, protein and choline, which helps break down fat in the body for energy.

"Egg is a complete protein only when accompanied by the yolk," says Ruia, "and a good source of vitamins of the B-complex group." The yolk is a good source of healthy fat and improves the absorption of vitamin D. According to a study, published in June in the *American Journal Of Clinical Nutrition*, adding eggs to a salad with a variety of raw vegetables improves the absorption of carotenoids, fat-soluble nutrients that help reduce inflammation and oxidative stress. The suggested diet for bodybuilders is two eggs a day; others can have one egg a day.

## Nuts

Almonds, walnuts and pistachios are a rich source of Mufa and are known to lower blood pressure, increase energy and regulate cholesterol.

"They are rich in protein, iron and omega-3 fatty acids," says Singh. Hazelnuts are rich in oleic acid and magnesium, and help reduce the risk of cancer, while almonds are high in calcium and selenium. Agarwal suggests four-six almonds, two walnuts and six pistachios a day.

## Cheese

Twenty grams of cheese every alternate day gives you the required fat and adds to your protein, calcium and vitamin B12 needs, says Pathak. Since cheese is a milk product, it's also a great source of calcium and protein. A slice of cheese is equivalent to a glass of milk.

If cheese is not your thing, replace it with white butter, cottage cheese (up to 60g) or curd (up to 300g). Ruia, however, suggests you stay away from low-fat, processed or fat-free dairy products. "They are chemically altered and lower the body's absorption of calcium from the dairy. On the other hand, they stress the digestive and immune systems because the body might consider the product as antigens or foreign bodies."

## Cold-pressed oils

A teaspoon or two of cold-pressed oils obtained from mustard and peanut, and olive and sunflower oil complete your good fat requirement, says Shikha Sharma, founder of health management centre Nutri-Health Systems Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi. Unlike refined oils, which break down the natural composition of oils, cold-pressed oil is obtained by pressing and grinding the fruit or seed with either heavy granite millstones or modern stainless-steel ones. Since the temperature doesn't rise beyond 49 degree Celsius, the oil retains all the original flavour, aroma and nutritional value. "Cold-pressed oils are rich in Mufa and Pufa, thus making them heart-friendly," says Agarwal. Sauté your vegetables with a teaspoon or add to salad dressings.

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