Hello podcast listeners!

I have put together a brief “reference sheet” to highlight the areas of concern in the 2017 Presidential Health Advisory report on Dietary Fats and Heart Disease that positions itself as the last word on the topic of saturated fats and heart disease, and has been widely covered by news outlets as a reminder to eat a low-fat diet and to add coconut oil to the FDA’s blacklist. Follow along by [downloading the PDF of the article here](http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/early/2017/06/15/CIR.0000000000000510).

The main conclusion of that report (which has nothing to do with coconut oil) is “progress in reducing CVD would be enhanced by replacing saturated fat by either type of unsaturated fat.” This is the prevailing politically charged nutritional recommendation that has been drilled into the psyche of the American public for decades. This isn’t anything we haven’t heard before or that the Weston A. Price Foundation has not already rebutted (search “cholesterol” in the WAPF website search bar).

The report begins by introducing the “well-established…scientific rationale for decreasing saturated fat in the diet,” which totals five studies. This wealth of scientific data includes two animal studies (ref 5, 6), a review study unable to establish causation (ref 4), and a human trial in which subjects, in addition to changing their diet, also stopped smoking and started exercising (ref 8).

Despite press about this report hyping revolutionary new scientific research, it highlights four core studies that were published in 1969, 1970, 1968 and 1989 (ref 20-23). The authors do recognize there may be concern with the old studies but cite “declining CVD incidence,” as a reason there aren’t any recent studies. Deaths from CVD may have declined in recent years, but according to the CDC, there are still 630,000 Americans (1 in 4) that die of CVD yearly. It seems that the potential research pool is not so small just yet, a fact that the authors themselves remind us in the introduction by stating: “cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading global cause of death.”

After detailing the outdated core studies, the authors go on to summarize results from numerous non-core studies. In the authors’ own words, these studies are problematic because they “had insufficient duration, low adherence, few events, and/or serious flaws in study design.” They also include observational studies even after admitting “simply comparing disease rates between people in a population who have low compared with high intake of saturated fat is fraught with potential for misinterpretation and misunderstanding,” and cite multiple animal studies, which should never be used to directly inform recommendations for humans.

The next section starts with the grandiose statement: “the LDL theory of atherosclerosis and CVD has support from the widest range of research studies.” But the seven studies cited don’t strike me as providing “support from the widest range of research studies,” considering three studies focused on genetic linked cholesterol abnormalities (ref 52, 53, 54), two focused on a specific cholesterol lowering drug trial (ref 55, 56), one was a rodent study (ref 57), and my personal favorite, one review paper that blames CVD more on endothelial inflammation than LDL levels (ref 58).

The authors then detail all the different types of fat they are villainizing and the ones they promote. They basically just remind us that animal fats and coconut oil are saturated fats and omega 3s are good for us. Facts we do not rebuke at all. This seems to be the only section in which coconut oil is mentioned, and the part of the report most widely sensationalized, despite providing no new information.

The report concludes that we should replace saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats, but also includes the strong recommendation that this replacement should occur *without* changing the total amount of fat in your diet. Since earlier in the report the authors recognize “the low-fat, high-carbohydrate approach did not significantly reduce CVD events,” they remind us in the conclusion that “reduction in total dietary fat or a goal for total fat intake is not recommended.”

In my opinion, even after wading through all 17 pages of contradictions and poor science, reading the American Heart Association state definitively that we should not reduce our dietary fat intake, but instead focus on the types of fat we are eating, seems like a win. The conclusions of this report are much more aligned with our Wise Traditions nutritional philosophies than anyone would have guessed by reading the news articles that attempted to summarize it for us.

So thank you, informed consumer, for listening to the podcast and for reading this and the actual scientific report yourself!

I am signing off with a renewed love for my properly sourced, high quality fats, and a sense of hope that the future direction of dietary research will continue to trend towards quality over quantity.

In health,

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