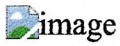


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Steak, Butter and Ice Cream: MAHA Sets Up Saturated-Fat Fight

BY ANDREA PETERSEN

Get ready for a fight over how much steak, butter and ice cream you should eat.

These beloved foods—not to mention pizza, cookies and many sandwiches—all contain saturated fat. For decades, the federal government has told Americans to reduce their consumption of this type of fat, citing its link to heart disease.

The government's advice may be changing soon.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said in July that the government would issue “new dietary guidelines that are common sense that stress the need to eat saturated fats, dairy, good meat, fresh meat and vegetables.”

Kennedy last month released the Trump administration's “Make America Healthy Again” strategy, which calls for bringing back to schools full-fat dairy products like whole milk. Kennedy told Fox News in August that he follows a carnivore diet of mainly meat, yogurt and fermented vegetables like kimchi. He has lauded food companies for using beef tallow.

Many scientists are alarmed, including members of a committee that advised the U.S. Agriculture and Health and Human Services departments on the latest update to the federal dietary guidelines. “The science is actually pretty clear. Exposure to unhealthy saturated fats, butter, full-fat dairy, fatty red meats, these things raise LDL cholesterol and contribute to heart disease,” said Cheryl A.M. Anderson, a professor at UC San Diego Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and member of the committee.

The current dietary guidelines, which are updated every five years, recommend people limit their saturated fat intake to less than 10% of daily calories. The American Heart Association goes further, suggesting saturated fats should make up less than 6% of daily calories.

Still, more than three-quarters of Americans eat more saturated fat than the guidelines currently recommend.

Here's what the science says about saturated fat and health: The push to get people to eat less saturated fat kicked off in the 1960s. Scientific studies found that replacing saturated fat from meat and dairy with polyunsaturated fat from vegetable oils lowered people's levels of low-density lipoprotein, known as LDL or bad cholesterol, and cut their risk of cardiovascular disease.

In the 1970s and 1980s, legions of people went all-in on low-fat diets. The food industry rushed to respond, and soon grocery store shelves were lined with low-fat snacks—often sugary and highly processed.

“We got rid of bad fat in the diet, but we didn't replace it with healthy fat,” said Eric Rimm, a nutrition scientist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Rates of obesity and Type 2 diabetes soared.

A few more recent studies confused things even more. Some research found that saturated fat intake didn't increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

But these studies didn't take into account what people ate instead of the saturated fat—and that matters a lot, said Rimm. Replacing saturated fat with healthy fat, like from soybean and corn oil, reduces cardiovascular disease risk. But swapping it for refined carbs like white bread, pizza and baked goods doesn't seem to provide any benefit, he said.

When eating foods like burgers and butter, some of the saturated fat is burned for energy and some is stored in body fat. How much your body can handle this way depends on your genes, your overall diet, how fit you are and other factors, said Dr. Romit Bhattacharya, a cardiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital.

What's left over is processed by the liver and turned into cholesterol, which enters the bloodstream and can build up in the arteries of the heart and brain.

Saturated fat also boosts the level of triglycerides in the blood. Elevated levels of triglycerides can increase the likelihood of heart disease, too.

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