

## Avocados Are Natural “Nutrient Boosters”

Research findings published in the August 2005 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition* indicate that avocados act as a “nutrient booster,” allowing the body to absorb significantly more “heart-healthy” and cancer-fighting nutrients like alpha-carotene, beta-carotene, and lycopene, found in fruits and vegetables.

The study was conducted at Ohio State University where adult men and women consumed salad and salsa with and without fresh avocado. The subjects who consumed the meals with 75 grams of avocado (equivalent to 2.5 tablespoons) absorbed 8.3 times more alpha-carotene and 13.6 times more beta-carotene, both of which may help protect against cancer and heart disease. The subjects also absorbed 4.3 times more lutein, which contributes to eye health and may protect against macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in the elderly.

The subjects who consumed salsa with 150 grams of avocado absorbed 4.4 times more lycopene, which has been linked to prostate cancer protection, while absorption of beta-carotene doubled. Researchers concluded that the monounsaturated fat in the avocados boosted the participants' ability to absorb the beneficial nutrients.

According to Dr. Steven Schwartz from Ohio State University, “Many fruits and vegetables are rich in beneficial carotenoids, but most fruits and vegetables are virtually fat free, which may limit the body's ability to absorb some of these nutrients. Our latest research shows that the natural fat content in avocados actually increases carotenoid absorption.”

Dr. David Heber, Professor of Medicine at the UCLA School of Medicine and author of *What Color Is Your Diet?*, concurs with Dr. Schwartz. “While it is well known that fats help in the absorption of colorful compounds that are good for you, such as lycopene from tomatoes and lutein from dark greens, the good fats from olives and avocados are better for you than many processed salad dressings made with hydrogenated vegetable oils.”

Ounce-per-ounce, avocados rank highest in monounsaturated fat, vitamin E, folate, potassium, magnesium, lutein, beta-sitosterol and glutathione, compared with other commonly eaten fruits. According to the Food and Drug Administration, diets rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of some types of cancer and other chronic diseases.

## The Fatty Acid Jungle

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in the early 1980's, when the soybean industry and the vegetable oil industry went on a campaign to take over the tropical oils market. They campaigned about the dangers of saturated fats and coconut oil and the benefits of soybean oil. They encouraged the families of half a million soybean growers to fan out across the United States, promoting the benefits of soybean oil and the dangers of saturated fats.

Well-meaning but misguided special-interest groups jumped on the bandwagon and started producing alarming news stories about the dangers of saturated fats. They were the first ones to label coconut oil as an artery-clogging saturated fat.

After a while, some of these researchers knew that coconut oil was harmless and tried to set the record straight, but everybody already thought that coconut oil was bad, so they did not listen. In fact, these researchers were ridiculed and criticized, so they backed off and remained silent.

Before long, food manufacturers and restaurants removed coconut oil from their foods and replaced it with hydrogenated soybean oil. Coconut oil has pretty much disappeared from the American diet. People had the misconception that it was a bad fat.

*Dr. Bruce Fife is an expert on coconut and health. He is the director of the Coconut Research Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the public and the scientific community on the nutritional and health benefits of coconut. He is the author of numerous books, including The Coconut Miracle, published by Piccadilly books.*

## DHA Fats May Provide Heart Health Benefits

Updated dietary guidelines released in January 2005 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture mention for the first time docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), an omega-3 fatty acid. The guidelines, which are issued every five years, represent the federal government's science-based advice to promote health and reduce risk of chronic diseases through nutrition and physical activity.

The previous guidelines, issued in 2000, recognized that some fish contain omega-3 fatty acids, which are being studied to determine whether they might protect against heart disease; however, these guidelines did not identify these omega-3 fatty acids as DHA and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). The new 2005 guidelines recognize an association between dietary consumption of fatty acids and a reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease for the general population.

The new guidelines recognize that other sources of DHA may provide similar cardiovascular benefits, although more research is needed. They do not specifically recommend a daily intake of DHA and EPA other than mentioning that two servings of fish per week (about 8 ounces total) might reduce the risk of mortality from coronary heart disease. Although the 2005 guidelines do mention fish intake, the report notes the advisories on lowering exposure to environmental contaminants in fish.

The 2005 guidelines note that women of childbearing age who are or might become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children should avoid some types of fish and shellfish that are high in mercury, a contaminant that may harm an unborn baby or a young child's developing nervous system.

DHA is a key component of the heart, and it is a major structural fatty acid in the gray matter of the brain and retina of the eye. A 1999 workshop sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the International Society for the Study of Fatty Acids and Lipids (ISSFAL) recommended a daily DHA intake of 220 milligrams (mg.) for healthy adults. However, the average daily DHA consumption based on a typical American diet is only 60 to 80 mg.

DHA is derived from a vegetarian source (microalgae) that does not contain the environmental contaminants found in fish.

## Some Fats Are Good For Weight Loss

Although low-fat diets are recommended for heart health, a moderate-fat, weight-loss diet reduced dieters' cardiovascular risk better than a low-fat diet, according to a recent study from Penn State.

The moderate-fat diet, in which half the fat was monounsaturated fat from peanuts and peanut oil, produced a 14 percent reduction in cardiovascular disease risk.

The group consuming the low-fat diet experienced a 9 percent improvement. Both of these diets were controlled so that all participants lost about the same amount of weight, approximately 2.4 to 2.7 pounds per week on average.

Fifty-three overweight or obese men and women participated in the study. All of the participants had total cholesterol levels elevated above 200 milligrams per deciliter (mg./dl.) at the start of the diet. They ate either a low-fat or a moderate-fat diet designed to produce weight loss for six weeks and then similar diets designed for maintenance of weight for four weeks.

The foods, supplied by the researchers, provided 18 percent of calories from fat in the low-fat diet or 33 percent of calories from fat in the moderate-fat diet.

Over the course of the study, the low-fat diet group experienced a 12 percent decrease in high-density lipoprotein-cholesterol (HDL-C), the “good cholesterol,” but the moderate-fat diet group experienced no change. This indicates that a moderate-fat diet blunts the decrease in HDL-C during weight loss.

After triglyceride levels fell during the weight-loss phase, they became significantly elevated during the maintenance phase for those participants on the low-fat diet but not for those on the moderate-fat diet. (Elevated triglycerides are a cardiovascular risk factor.)

The study indicated that markedly lowering total fat intake might have adverse consequences on reductions in the risk of cardiovascular disease, even in response to weight loss.

(Source: *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, February 2004.)

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