



**ENERGIZE YOUR LIFE!**  
**EAT HEALTHY-BE ACTIVE**

This newsletter is produced by the *Nutrition Education Network of Washington* to enhance communication and coordination among those who educate Washington families about nutrition and food. *Energize Newsletter for Nutrition Educators* shares brief information about programs and materials that support healthful and enjoyable eating.

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**SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION**

*Energize Newsletter for Nutrition Educators* can be sent to you electronically each month. There is no charge. To subscribe or unsubscribe, contact Christa Albice, WSU Puyallup, 253-445-4541, e-mail [albice@wsu.edu](mailto:albice@wsu.edu).

To access past issues, go to <http://nutrition.wsu.edu/take5/index.html>.

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**This Month's Focus- *Low-fat or Pro-fat?***

For most nutrition educators, our mantra historically has been to guide the people we serve to reduce the amount of fat in their diets. Because fats are a concentrated source of calories and since excess calories can lead to overweight and its health consequences, this general guidance has made sense. Recent studies and headlines, however, have sparked a deeper look into fats, particularly saturated fats. Many years of research and government dietary guidelines have urged reducing intake of saturated fats because of their relationship with increased risk for cardiovascular disease. However, this guidance does not account for the food source of the saturated fat. In this issue of the *Energize Newsletter for Nutrition Educators*, we will explore what consumers have been hearing about the sat-fat controversy. While holding fast to using the Dietary Guidelines in our programming, we nevertheless want to be able to answer questions that may challenge this advice.

**Dietary Guidelines' Fat Recommendations** – A priority of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans was to address the country's obesity epidemic, so a key recommendation was to limit fat. Yet, some foods containing fat also provide important nutrients (such as avocados and nuts) while others provide little nutritional contribution to the diet (such as grain-based desserts). The Dietary Guidelines recommend limiting saturated fats to 10% or less of calories and replacing them with unsaturated fats. In 2013, the American Heart Association/American College of Cardiology Lifestyle Management cut the saturated fat recommended limit even further to 5-6% of calories.



Photo Courtesy of USDA MyPlate

**How the Fat Controversy Became a Media Buzz** – In March 2014, a research study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* was published, concluding that, "Current evidence does not clearly support cardiovascular guidelines that encourage high consumption of polyunsaturated fatty acids and low consumption of total saturated fats." About the same time a book was published called *The Big Fat Surprise: Why Butter, Meat, and Cheese Belong in a Healthy Diet* by Nina Teicholz. In June, a huge curl of butter appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine showcasing its lead story, "Eat Butter. Scientists labeled fat the enemy. Why were they wrong?" These publications have been both blasted and praised – and have confused consumers about what to eat.

**Review of Fatty Acid Research** – A group of 14 researchers set out to summarize evidence about associations between fatty acids and coronary disease. The research review and meta-analysis included 72 unique studies from around the world: 45 observational studies and 27 randomized, controlled trials. After compiling and analyzing all of them, they found no connection between total saturated fatty acids and heart disease risk, either from the diet or when using biomarkers. They also did not find a protective effect from polyunsaturated fatty acids. Their bottom line was that nutritional guidelines on fatty acids and cardiovascular health may need to be reappraised to reflect the current evidence. (Source: R Chowdhury et al, "Association of dietary, circulating, and supplement fatty acids with coronary risk: A systematic review and meta-analysis." *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 160:398-406, March 2014.



Photo Courtesy of ChooseMyPlate

**Dietary Fat Isn't "Bad"** – When focusing on reducing fat in the diet, it's tempting to demonize it as "bad for you." Not so. Dietary fats are found in both plant and animal foods, and they play an important role. Fats supply not just calories but certain essential fatty acids that can't come from other foods or be made by the body. They also help in the absorption of the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K.

**Breaking Down Fat Terminology** – Fats are made of components called fatty acids which can be categorized as being saturated, monounsaturated, or polyunsaturated. Foods have a combination of all of these. For example, while we think of olive oil as a monounsaturated fat, it also contains saturated and polyunsaturated fat.

- **Saturated Fat:** Research studies have suggested that saturated fatty acids in the diet lead to higher levels of blood total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol. Both are risk factors for heart disease. There is no dietary requirement for saturated fatty acids and the body can manufacture enough to meet its needs. Saturated fatty acids can be long-chain, medium-chain, and short-chain. Within these categories, there are many, many types of fatty acids, each with its unique effect on the body.
- **Unsaturated Fat:** An unsaturated fat molecule has at least one double bond within the fatty acid chain. A fatty acid chain is monounsaturated if it has one double bond, and polyunsaturated if it has more than one double bond. When double bonds are formed, hydrogen atoms are eliminated. A saturated fat has no double bonds, therefore it is "saturated" with hydrogen atoms.
- **Trans Fat:** *Trans* fatty acids can be made during food processing by hydrogenating (adding hydrogen molecules) to an unsaturated fatty acid which turns it into a saturated fat, which is a solid fat (such as margarine or vegetable shortening). Many food manufacturers stopped using *trans* fat so it's valuable to read the label. Listing the amount of *trans* fat on the Nutrition Facts panel became mandatory in 2006.
- **Solid Fats:** Most fats with a high percentage of saturated fat are solid at room temperature. The Dietary Guidelines recommend reducing solid fats and added sugars, hence its acronym "SoFAs." They include saturated fats.
- **Oils:** Most fats that contain mostly unsaturated fatty acids are usually liquid at room temperature and are called oils. These include unsaturated fats primarily from plant sources.
- **Cholesterol:** The body makes enough cholesterol for its needed functions in the body, so people do not need to include cholesterol in the diet. Some research has shown that dietary cholesterol raises blood LDL cholesterol in some people, but its potential negative effects are relatively small.

(For further information including a chart of the fatty acid profiles of common fats and oils, see pages 24-27 of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services, [www.dietaryguidelines.gov](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov))

**Making Informed Fat and Oil Choices** – ChooseMyPlate offers downloadable nuts-and-bolts handouts about nutrient-rich foods that also contain fats and oils. "How do I count the oils I eat?" lists foods such as olives, peanut butter, and sunflower seeds along with the amount of oil and calories, [www.choosemyplate.gov/printpages/MyPlateFoodGroups/Oils/food-groups.oils-count.pdf](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/printpages/MyPlateFoodGroups/Oils/food-groups.oils-count.pdf) "Why is it important to make lean or low-fat choices from the protein foods group?" lists plant and vegetable sources of protein in common portion sizes, describes their nutrient contribution, and cautions about saturated fats and cholesterol, [www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/protein-foods-why.html](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/protein-foods-why.html).



Photo Courtesy of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Coconut Oil** – One of the tropical oils (others include palm oil and palm kernel oil), coconut oil has been touted as a food that may improve immune function and prevent thyroid disease, heart disease, cancer, and HIV. Although testimonies abound, there is little convincing evidence that these claims hold water. Coconut oil contains 92% saturated fat, but the types of saturated fatty acids are an unusual blend of short- and medium-chain fatty acids, particularly lauric and myristic acids. These two may offer potential health benefits, but time and research will tell.

**Skim milk for young children?** Elyn Satter, a Registered Dietitian and family therapist, has long been recognized for her division of food responsibility: parents decide what foods and when to offer, and children decide how much to eat. In the March 2015 issue of her online newsletter, she answers the question about whether to put a child on skim milk. She writes, "The thinking is that drinking low-fat milk and eating low-fat dairy products will decrease calorie and saturated fat intake, thereby decreasing obesity and heart disease. It doesn't work." She goes on to provide one research study after the next to demonstrate her point, and to caution not to get a child's fat

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intake down too low. Her take-away messages are to use whole milk for children under two years of age, and after that to switch to lower fat milk if other family members like it and drink it, provided that they have other reliable dietary fat sources. (Source:

<http://ellynsatterinstitute.org/fmf/fmf-98-fat-in-milk.php>)

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

**Healthy Food Bank Hub Video** – Feeding America, in collaboration with the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation, the American Heart Association, and Feeding America's network of food banks, recently released a video highlighting the goals of their website, [www.HealthyFoodBankHub.org](http://www.HealthyFoodBankHub.org). The new promotional video includes images displaying the Hub's content, tools, resources, and platforms for connecting professionals and organizations working in the areas of nutrition and food insecurity. The 3½-minute video can be used in training of staff and volunteers who work with food bank clients

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAeVBUEdn0Y&index=1&list=UUsroi4rRBMwrs9C1pJP4jiv](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAeVBUEdn0Y&index=1&list=UUsroi4rRBMwrs9C1pJP4jiv)

In February, 70 new free downloadable handouts were posted to the website using the screening tool DANEH (Developing and Assessing Nutrition Education Handout), <http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Nutrition-Education-Handout-Checklist-rev-10-17-13.pdf>

## WASHINGTON GROWN

**Fresh This Month** – One of the first food plants harvested each year, rhubarb is a sign of springtime. Washington and Oregon are the largest producers of this tart plant, grown both outdoors in fields and in hotheouses. In our state, the climate in and near Sumner are ideal for growing rhubarb. Many backyard gardeners look forward to the budding of their plants, which die back each year, then bud and unfold in the spring. The stalks are tart, so they are generally prepared with sugar, such as pies and cobblers, but can be used in other preparations where acid is needed, such as barbecue sauce. Nutritionally, rhubarb provides the phytochemical anthocyanins, responsible for its red color. It also provides fiber and is a reasonable amount of vitamin K. Known for centuries as a laxative and diuretic, it has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for this purpose. If consumers don't know already, they should be cautioned not to eat the leaves as they are poisonous. With high levels of oxalic acid and another yet-unknown substance (probably anthraquinone glycosides), eating too many leaves can cause severe health problems, including death. For more information about rhubarb, see



Photo Courtesy of Washington State University Extension

<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/rhubarb-0>, <http://snap.nal.usda.gov/nutrition-through-seasons/seasonal-produce/rhubarb>, and [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002876.htm](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002876.htm).

## DID YOU KNOW?

It comes as no surprise to nutrition educators who work with school-age children to know that teachers say their students come to school hungry. However, it can be shocking to hear how many teachers make that comment. A recent survey by No Kid Hungry found that 76% of public school teachers reported students coming to school hungry regularly. (Source: [www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/04/public-schools-breakfast\\_n\\_6794012.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/04/public-schools-breakfast_n_6794012.html))



### EAT TOGETHER EAT BETTER – Family Meals Focus

*Because our readers have told us that Family Meals is a hot topic, in the May 2011 issue we began a small section on recent news relating to this topic and our long-standing signature program, Eat Together, Eat Better.*

**Nutritional benefits of family meals vary by the age of the kids.** That's the conclusion of researchers who compared diets of children and teens who ate five or more meals with parents or caregivers per week against those who ate together fewer than five meals per week. Results by age group of children having five or more family meals per week were:

- Young children: Less sugar-sweetened beverages (but no impact on vegetable or fruit intake)
- Older children: Less sugar-sweetened beverages, greater vegetable intake (but no impact on fruit intake)
- Teens: Greater vegetable and fruit intake (but no impact on sugar-sweetened beverages)

(Source: Fink SK et al, "Family meals and diet quality among children and adolescents in North Carolina." *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 46(5):418-422, 2014).

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