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A:

Fat and cholesterol are decidedly different nutrients.

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance found only in animal products such as egg yolks, organ meats and whole milk dairy products. Cholesterol has no calories and is not the major cause of increasing blood cholesterol in our bodies. The liver will make cholesterol regardless of our dietary intake. Certain people may be genetically programmed to make higher or lower levels of cholesterol, while other people may produce more or less as a result of their diet (amount saturated fat and hydrogenated oil) and lifestyle choices (amount of physical activity, smoking).

Fat, on the other hand, does have calories. It can occur naturally in both animal and vegetable foods and is often added to foods or used in food preparations.

Fat intake gets complicated because there are good fats, bad fats and so-so fats. However, too much of any kind of fat isn't good. We all need some fat to perform important functions in the body: hormone production, immune function, nerve conduction, protecting our organs, providing energy and helping the body absorb essential vitamins. The dietary message should be low fat... not no fat.

Eat less Trans fats and Hydrogenated fats. When liquid vegetable oils are heated in the presence of hydrogen during processing they become hydrogenated. This is how trans fatty

acids are made. The more hydrogenated an oil, the harder it will be at room temperature. Trans fats are found in stick margarine, shortening and many commercially prepared baked goods, cookies, crackers and processed foods. Heating oil to high temperature as in frying also results in trans fat. Trans fats are considered "bad" because they raise LDL (bad) cholesterol and lower HDL (good) cholesterol.

Eat less Saturated fats, which are found mostly in animal products such as whole milk dairy products, animal fat and vegetable products such as coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oils. They are considered "bad" because in large amounts they are the fats

most likely responsible for raising your blood cholesterol.

Eat more Polyunsaturated and Monounsaturated fats. These fats are found primarily in oils from plants. Sunflower, safflower, corn and soybean bean oils and fatty fish like salmon and tuna are rich in polyunsaturated fats. Canola, olive and peanut oils, olives, avocados and nuts are rich in monounsaturated fats. They are considered "good" oils because they tend to decrease LDL levels and increase HDL levels. However, if you are overweight, keep in mind that all fats and oils are high in calories so use them carefully.

Q: What is the difference between fat and cholesterol and should I avoid them?

Got a question? email: wildcatnutrition@yahoo.com

Adapted from www.collegeeatingguide.com/column/archives/foodbites02-05/foodbites02-05.htm, Ann Litt, MS, RD, LD. Accessed 3/21/05.

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