

SNG-Animal fat may be good for you-6-15-15

Animal fat may be good for you

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A crusty dairy farmer friend recently barged into my office and unceremoniously plopped a thick book on my desk. He then harrumphed: “Now you can go out and eat a big steak and have lots of real cream on your strawberry shortcake!”

The 500-page book is *The Big Fat Surprise* (2014) by Nina Teicholz, an accomplished writer who studied biology at Stanford and Yale and has a graduate degree from Oxford University.

This is not your run of the mill, breezy diet book. It has 335 footnotes and lists almost 1,000 scientific books and articles in the bibliography.

After eight years of research, Teicholz concludes that the low fat, low cholesterol diet, almost deified since the 1950s, was based on inadequate science, which never proved that saturated fat and high cholesterol cause heart disease.

Among those who have apparently changed their perspectives on saturated fats and health is Ronald Krauss, MD, PhD, a giant among nutrition scientists. Krauss concludes, in Teicholz’ words, that eating saturated fat is healthier than eating carbohydrates.

In other words, says Teicholz, “Cheese is probably healthier than bread. And eggs and bacon better than oatmeal.”

[I have over the decades been conditioned to pore over food labels, rejecting anything with more than a gram of saturated fat, avoiding red meat most of the time.

[The incessant drumbeat of low-fat guidance from scientists and the food industry just seemed so logical—animal fat must clog your arteries and make you fat.]

Teicholz builds a strong case that in the 1950s a nutrition biologist with missionary zeal named Ancel Keys became convinced from a major observational study of his that saturated fat increased cholesterol, which in turn caused heart disease.

The research by Keys showed, however, only an association of these variables, and we all know that correlation does not equal causation.

Teicholz says that rigorous, double-blind clinical studies of the possible causation of heart disease by saturated fats, admittedly difficult to conduct, were never done.

And Keys was a bully. He and his fellow true believers in the nutrition community ridiculed, suppressed, ignored, shunned those who expressed concern that their case had not been proved, or who identified other studies that raised questions about the low saturated fat connection to heart disease.

I was trained in the soft science of politics, yet what I was taught appears like child's play against the down-and-dirty politics of Big Science, as detailed by Teicholz, where scientists-as-advocates, industry, associations, and government agencies all join hands to protect their respective interests.

For example, way back in 1957 University of Illinois biochemist Fred Kummerow was the first to sound the alarm about the possible health hazards of trans fats, those partially hydrogenated soybean and other oils that had become prominent dietary replacements for saturated animal fat.

The food industry and the American Heart Association, which were both pushing vegetable oils as the preferred alternative to saturated fat, would hear nothing of Kummerow's research.

Fred's career suffered. He lost funding for his research and was dropped from AHA committees, where he was becoming a big wheel prior to his disquieting findings.

Fred Kummerow is a remarkable man. At age 100, he still directs a small research lab at the U. of I. Over more than half a century, he never gave up his often lonely battle to discredit trans fats.

This month the Food and Drug Administration is expected, nearly six decades after Fred's pioneering work, to ban trans fats (after we have eaten oceans of it), in large part because of Fred's research and persistence.

Now the new problem may well be that the liquid vegetable oil alternative to trans fats (other than saturated animal fats), when used in commercial frying, may be worse than the trans fats.

Kummerow finds that when raised to high temperatures polyunsaturated vegetable oils oxidize, and that's bad.

Fred says the big challenge now is to get the food industry to find a better frying oil.

An even larger question is whom do we trust when it comes to the work of science?

"Veritas" (truth) is the motto of a small college where I have taught, yet Nina Teicholz indicts dietary food science research for putting the pursuit of truth pretty low on its list of priorities.

For myself, I plan henceforth to avoid fried foods (including chicken and French fries [sigh]) and pursue a diet of fruits, vegetables, grains—and from time to time include a ribeye with lots of rich crumbled Roquefort on my salad.

And to take scientific research findings with a grain of salt.