Guide to choosing healthy fats

Healthy fats like omega 3 fatty acids are important for your mental and physical wellbeing. Knowledge of how to include healthy fat options in your diet can improve health and ward off diseases.

New Delhi, Dec 07, 2016: Contrary to the popular belief, not all fat is bad for health. Our body needs fat for basic functioning at the cellular level. The difference lies in the type of fat being used. While omega 3 fatty acids and monounsaturated fats are important and beneficial for health, unhealthy fats include trans fats and omega 6 fatty acids.

Padma Shri Awardee Dr. K.K Aggarwal, President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and National President Elect Indian Medical Association (IMA), stated that, “Some trans fats occur naturally in foods, especially those of animal origin. The chemical configuration of trans fatty acids confers harmful effects, including adverse influences on blood LDL– and HDL–cholesterol concentrations. They raise LDL and lower HDL cholesterol. By comparison, consumption of saturated fats also raises the LDL cholesterol concentration, but does not lower HDL. Thus, while saturated fats adversely affect the lipid profile, they may not be as harmful as trans fatty acids. Trans fatty acids may also interfere with the desaturation and elongation of n–3 (omega–3) fatty acids. These are important for the prevention of heart disease and complications of pregnancy.”

In an analysis from the Nurses’ Health Study, for each increase of 2 percent of energy from trans fat, the relative risk for incident coronary heart disease was 1.93. There are no known physiologic benefits related to the consumption of trans fatty acids; thus, reduction in their intake makes sense.

“Choose alternative fats. Replace saturated and trans fats in your diet with mono- and polyunsaturated fats. These fats do not raise LDL (or “bad”) cholesterol levels and have health benefits when eaten in moderation. Sources of monounsaturated fats include olive and canola oils. Sources of polyunsaturated fats include soybean, corn, sunflower oils, and foods like nuts”, added Dr. Aggarwal.

Some guidelines for choosing healthy fats are as follows:

- Check the Nutrition Facts panel: Choose foods lower in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol.
- Choose vegetable oils (except coconut and palm kernel oils) and soft margarines (liquid, tub, or spray) more often because the combined amount of saturated and trans-fats is lower than the amount in solid shortenings, hard margarines, and animal fats, including butter.
- Consider fish. Most fish are lower in saturated fat than meat. Some fish, such as mackerel, sardines and salmon contain omega–3 fatty acids that are being studied to determine if they offer protection against heart disease.
- Limit foods high in cholesterol such as liver and other organ meats, egg yolks and full-fat dairy products, like whole milk.
- Choose foods low in saturated fat such as fat free or 1% dairy products, lean meats, fish, skinless poultry, whole grain foods and fruit and vegetables.

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About Heart Care Foundation of India

Initiated in 1986, the Heart Care Foundation of India is a leading National NGO working in the field of creating mass health awareness among people from all walks of life and providing solutions for India's everyday healthcare needs. The NGO uses consumer-based entertainment modules to impart health education and increase awareness amongst people. A leading example of this is the Perfect Health Mela; an annual event started in 1993 that is attended by over 2-3 lakh people each year. The Mela showcases activities across categories such as health education seminars and check-ups, entertainment programs, lifestyle exhibitions, lectures, workshops, and competitions. In addition to this, the NGO conducts programs and camps to train people on the technique of hands only CPR through its CPR 10 mantra for revival after a sudden cardiac arrest. They currently hold three Limca book of world records for the maximum number of people trained in hands-only CPR in one go. Keeping article 21 of the Indian Constitution in mind, which guarantees a person Right to Life, Heart Care Foundation of India has also recently initiated a project called the Sameer Malik Heart Care Foundation Fund to ensure that no one dies of a heart disease just because they cannot afford treatment.

For more information, please contact

Heart Care Foundation of India

Sanjeev Khanna- 9871079105
Md Adib Ahmed- 9873716235
Email- media.hcfi@gmail.com