

Will New Study Scare the Fat Out of People?

A study conducted by the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) was recently released, making low-fat consumers second-guess their years of French fry forfeiting.

The \$415 million federally funded, eight-year study of post-menopausal women, ages 50-79, showed that merely cutting the total amount of fat in one's diet does not significantly reduce the risk of heart disease, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, or stroke.

The study, designed in the early nineties, called for 19,541 women to reduce their fat intake to less than 20% of their calories, eat five daily servings of fruit and vegetables, and six portions of whole grains, while the other 29,294 woman stuck with their normal dietary habits. Based on BMI measurements, 35% of the women were overweight and over 30% were obese.

The women restricted to the low-fat diet were only able to reduce fat intake to 24% in the first year and 29% later, rather than reaching the 20% goal. The resulting measure of LDL cholesterol of the dieting group was only two percentage points lower than the control group. Most women remained overweight. Breast cancer incident in the low-fat group was only nine percent lower than the control group, which is considered insignificant. Blood pressure remained the same in both groups.

Many argue that the study is outdated. Since the study was created, information about heart-protecting fats found in fish and vegetable oils has surfaced, distinguishing between "good" and "bad" fats. Rather than simply reducing all fats, considering the type of fat you eat is also important. Other studies have shown that trading in saturated and trans fats for good fats, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and the addition of daily exercise can, in fact, lower the risk of heart disease and health problems relating to it.

Despite this medical research, low-fat foods still have a place at the table.

"It's the granddaddy of health claims," says Tom Vierhile, director of Datamonitor's Productionscan Online. "To even get in the game with certain food categories-like dairy products-you have to have a low-fat offering."

In 2005, foods that boasted a low-fat label racked up \$35.6 billion, raising 4.5% in one year. In the past ten years, more than 20,000 low-to-no-fat foods have entered the market.

The only notable changes in low or no-fat marketing brought on by the study might be more labels touting "no trans fat" and "no saturated fat" labels.

For more information regarding the good fats, the bad fats and all the fats in between, contact the FoodWise Group at www.foodwisegroup.com.