

In the Obesity Debate, Fats Are Innocent!

Fats have long had a bad press. Blamed for both obesity and for clogging arteries amongst other conditions but the evidence does not stack up in either case.

Obesity is the result of fat being stored rather than being burned and the culprit is carbohydrate as this article explains. Equally, weight loss is about fat loss, and is not necessarily about putting fewer calories in, eating less or exercising more.

Furthermore, the evidence that obesity results from a sedentary lifestyle is neither conclusive nor compelling... long term studies have pointed to diet as the main culprit. Obesity has increased exponentially having grown from 2.7% of the UK population in the early 1970s to over 25% by the turn of the century. What has changed? Diet, and particularly the consumption of processed foods.

The human body contains two types of fats - triglycerides and fatty acids. Fatty acids are burned as fuel. Triglycerides, on the other hand, are stored as fat and this is the fat that shows when people are overweight. Triglycerides comprise three types of fatty acid and are combined by a substance called glycerol. Once combined, they are too big to move across the fat cell wall. When our bodies need to burn fat ie. we need fuel, the triglycerides break down back into fatty acids and move outside the cell wall. If they aren't burned they are restored in the fat cells.

But without glycerol, the fatty acids do not combine and so cannot be stored. If we make more glucose available to fat cells, more glycerol can be made. If more glycerol can be made, more fat is stored in the fat cells. Where does the glycerol originate? From glucose... from carbohydrates.

So carbs are the guilty party. More carbs mean more glucose means more glycerol. Fewer carbs, less glucose, less glycerol... less stored fat and less obesity. Which is why the Glycaemic Index – based on the glucose levels in food - is a good way to plan your diet. All this has been known since the early part of the last century! Why then has it not been more widely accepted by the establishment? Perhaps something to do with the size of the processed food industry?

Incidentally, fat probably does not clog arteries. Logic would determine that if it did then it would clog veins too – which are narrower – and it doesn't. But this is the subject for another article.