

Food is



By Akinwale Akingbule, Extension Educator

Food is Medicine: Focus on Fats

Heart disease remains one of the leading causes of death in the United States. There are many risk factors associated with heart disease and it continues to be a problem because many factors determine having the disease. Today, we will look at a few simple things you can do to lower your risk of getting heart disease. By recognizing the risk factors, we can take preventive measures to reduce the likelihood of developing the disease. Risk factors can be classified as modifiable and non-modifiable. Modifiable risk factors are within our control such as having hypertension or diabetes, smoking, consuming too much alcohol, living a sedentary lifestyle, and eating diets rich in unhealthy fats. On the other hand, we do not have control over non-modifiable risks. Examples of non-modifiable risk factors are age, being male or a post-menopausal female, family history and others. Some types of fat have been associated with increasing your risk of developing heart disease. What are they and how do you avoid them? This will be discussed throughout the article. Though many times people talk of fat as bad, fat remains a major source of energy for our body. Fat is part of every cell membrane in our body. It is useful for absorbing vitamins and minerals. It is also needed for keeping warm. So why do we think of fat as a bad thing? It is because there are good fats and bad fats. Let us start with the bad fats.

Bad Fat and Sources

There are two types of fat that should be reduced in your diet. They are trans-fat and saturated fat. Trans-fat should be avoided as often as possible. When you have the opportunity to read food labels, choose food with 0% trans-fat. The lower the percentage daily value (% DV) of saturated fat on the food label, the better. Dietary guidelines for Americans 2015-2020 recommends that lower than 10% of your calories should be from saturated fat. They largely contribute to formation of solid fats. Saturated fat and trans-fat easily form plaque in blood vessels and play a role in clogging arteries hence causing heart disease, hypertension and stroke.

Data from What We Eat in America (WWEIA) food category analysis for the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory committee shows that 35% of the saturated fat, are consumed from mixed dishes such as burgers, sandwiches, meat, poultry, rice and pasta. The other categories that provide saturated fat are sweets and snacks. The recommendation is to reduce consumption of saturated fats.

Good fats and how to increase them

Good fats are the unsaturated fats. They are both monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. They are fat to increase in our diets. These have been found to reduce the risk of heart disease. Unlike trans and saturated fats, they are liquid at room temperature. They can be found in nuts, sesame seeds, avocados, olive oil, canola oil, and many more. On the average, consumption of unsaturated fats are below what is needed for most age groups according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015 -2020.

Simple ways to increase your consumption of unsaturated oils include:

1. Use oils instead of solid fat (butter, stick margarine, lard, coconut oil) when making your food.
2. Increase intake of seafood and nuts in place of meat and poultry. Fatty fish are rich in healthy oils. Examples: mackerel, trout, salmon, and herring.

Tips to reducing bad fat and increase healthy fat

1. Reducing your portion size can help in reducing your total intake of saturated fat.
2. American heart association recommends you eat two or more servings of fatty fish per week. A serving of fish is 3.5 ounce cooked fish.
3. Choose dressings that are from oils rather than solid fat.
4. Choose low fat dairy.
5. Pay attention to food labels and choose trans-fat 0% and food with lower saturated fats. On the food label, 5% Daily value (DV) or less of saturated fat per serving is low. 20% or more of saturated fat per serving is high.
6. Choose lean cut of meat and poultry.
7. Try baking, broiling, grilling or steaming. These cooking methods do not add extra fat.
8. Eat fruits and vegetables as they are naturally low in saturated fat.

Limiting saturated fat and eating more unsaturated fat are active steps you can take to reduce your risk of heart disease because food is medicine.