

HEALTH MINISTRIES

Carolina Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists



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From our
Health
Ministries
Director



Dexter Richardson,
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Haw River and
New Life
Fellowship
congregations

As we enter the summer season, may you experience a healthy renewal that includes the mental, spiritual, and physical and beyond. Good all-around health allows us to serve God, give our best to our families, and commit to being faithful stewards of the gifts God has entrusted us with, and to share the fullness of the Good News of Jesus with our communities. At the Health Ministries department, we want to support you and your local church in these endeavors as we seek to share and communicate God's goodness and love with our neighbors.

"For a community to be whole and healthy, it must be based on people's love and concern for each other."

Millard Fuller, Founder of Habitat for Humanity

Fat is Not the Enemy: Rethinking the Role of Fat in a Healthy Diet

Roman Pawlak PhD, RDN

For many people, the word fat often evokes negative associations. Yet, as with other macro- and micronutrients, fat is essential to human nutrition. Fats and oils are chemical compounds that are insoluble in water. It is crucial to recognize that although we commonly refer to “fat” and “oil” as singular categories, fats and oils—collectively known as lipids—comprise a highly diverse group of compounds. They can be categorized by saturation level (saturated, monounsaturated, polyunsaturated), by chain length (short-, medium-, and long-chain fatty acids), and by family (e.g., omega-3, omega-6).

Fats are ingested and synthesized in the body in various forms and shapes, such as triglycerides, phospholipids, and sterols. There are further distinctions within these categories, each with different physiological effects. For example, saturated fats include stearic acid, palmitic acid, myristic acid, lauric acid, and others. Omega-3 fats include alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), stearidonic acid (SDA), eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).

"Fat is bad" or "Unhealthy"

Despite this complexity, public discourse often reduces fat to overly simplistic messages such as “fat is bad” or “unhealthy.” But do all fats have the same effect on health? Certainly not. Due to their complex chemical structures and diverse functions, fats play a wide range of essential roles in the human body. Here are just a few examples:

- Fat is critical for neuronal growth and development, constituting about 60% of the brain’s dry weight.
- It is a key structural component of all cell membranes throughout the body.
- Fat supports nerve signaling and communication in the nervous system.
- It serves as a precursor to produce steroid and sex hormones, including vitamin D.
- Fat is essential for maintaining skin integrity, promoting hair growth, and strengthening nails.
- It contributes to wound healing and tissue repair.
- Fat enables the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K) and various phytochemicals.

Fat enhances flavor and texture in food, increasing meal satisfaction and palatability. It also slows gastric emptying, which contributes to satiety and helps reduce feelings of hunger.

The health-promoting roles of fat are often underappreciated. Yet, certain plant-based and some animal fat sources, such as fish, have been shown to:

- Improve blood cholesterol levels
- Reduce systemic inflammation
- Enhance endothelial (surface of blood vessels) function and blood flow
- Exhibit anti-platelet (anti-aggregating) effects (thus reducing the risk of a heart attack or stroke)
- Lower the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cognitive decline, dementia, Parkinson's disease, and bone fractures.
- Support a healthy gut microbiome.

Misconceptions About Fat

Misconceptions about fat are common. Some believe consuming fat as part of whole foods achieves the best health outcomes. They think that extracted fats, such as oils, are inherently harmful. While this may be true for some fats and food matrices, it is not universally applicable.

Consider the findings of an extensive Spanish study involving nearly 8,000 individuals assigned to one of three diets:

- Group 1: Mediterranean diet with reduced fat intake, including limited use of nuts and olive oil
- Group 2: Mediterranean diet supplemented with extra virgin olive oil
- Group 3: Mediterranean diet supplemented with mixed nuts

After about five years, 288 participants experienced a major cardiovascular event (e.g., heart attack, stroke, or cardiovascular death). Interestingly, those in the olive oil-supplemented group had the lowest risk, while those in the reduced-fat group had the highest. The authors concluded:

“In this study involving persons at high cardiovascular risk, the incidence of major cardiovascular events was lower among those assigned to a Mediterranean diet supplemented with extra-virgin olive oil or nuts than among those assigned to a reduced-fat diet.”

Additionally, several studies have reported that replacing some dietary carbohydrates with monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats can reduce the risk of chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

Understanding the link between adverse health outcomes and specific types or sources of fat is crucial. Excess consumption of certain types of fat generally contributes to adverse health outcomes.

As a nutrient category, not all fats lead to adverse health effects. Therefore, rather than focusing solely on reducing fat intake, we should emphasize including healthful fat sources in the diet. Examples of such sources include:

- ❖ Nuts and seeds
- ❖ Extra virgin olive oil
- ❖ Virgin seed oils, such as:
 - Sunflower seed oil (rich in vitamin E)
 - Sesame seed oil
 - Canola oil
 - Avocado oil
 - Using these fats in moderation can significantly improve the quality of a diet and help reduce the risk of numerous chronic health condition.

Questions from our readers

We welcome your questions. Please submit them by sending an email to: drichardson@carolinasda.org

Health Tip

Watch Out for High Amounts of Folic Acid!

Many Adventists use nutritional yeast. Some use it as a cheese substitute, as it can add a cheesy flavor to recipes. Many brands fortify their products with various nutrients, including B vitamins, so that others can consume them for their nutritional value.

However, it is advisable to avoid nutritional yeast that contains high amounts of a B-vitamin called folic acid. Some brands provide two to three times the recommended daily intake of folic acid per serving. In contrast, others contain lower amounts, though often still more than 50% of the daily recommended value.

The primary concern with high folic acid intake is its potential to interfere with vitamin B12 metabolism. This interference can lead to elevated homocysteine levels, a compound linked to increased risk of heart disease, cognitive decline, and other health conditions. The adverse effects of excessive folic acid are particularly significant in individuals with low vitamin B12 levels.

It is important to note that a well-balanced vegetarian or vegan diet naturally provides more than enough folate (the natural form of folic acid) from whole plant foods. Therefore, there is no nutritional need to rely on fortified foods containing synthetic folic acid.

The MyPlate graph to the left shows how folate from foods can meet and exceed the current recommendation for this vitamin. Adults should consume 400 mcg of folate per day.

Folate content in selected food items



Health Events in the Carolina Conference

Carolina Camp Meeting at Lake Junaluska 2026 (May 24 through May 30)

Dr. Jeremy Beckworth and Randy Tryon will present our health seminar from Monday to Friday during the Carolina Conference camp meeting in 2026. One of the key topics discussed in this seminar is how to reach the community with the gospel through health ministries. Further details about additional topics will be forthcoming in our next health ministries newsletter.

5K run on Friday morning at Carolina Camp Meeting.

If you are having a health ministries program at your church or in the community please send your information to drichardson@carolinasda.org.

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