

Healthy versus Inflammatory fats

The fats, in general, have gotten a bad reputation. However, similar to Proteins and the Carbohydrates, fats are one of the three essential macronutrients, and have several functions:

- The fats in the food curb appetite and food cravings by keeping the food in the stomach for a longer time.
- Healthy fats are an essential macronutrient for sustaining the brain and nerve tissues, which are rich in fat.
- Several hormones in the body like Cortisol and sex hormones get synthesized from the fat molecules.
- The protective coverings of body cells require fat molecules.

It is critical to know what is healthy versus unhealthy fats as healthy fats are essential for the body, and unhealthy fats cause disease.

Healthy fats – These include cold compressed plant oils such as- Extra virgin olive, Mustard, Sesame, and coconut oil. Animal fats such as Ghee and Butter are healthy only when consumed in small amounts. The fish, seeds, and nuts are rich sources of very healthy omega 3 fats.

The problem with olive oil usage in India is that the healthy extra virgin preparation is very pricey, and its purity is not guaranteed. Furthermore, most olive oil sold in India is not the first press virgin olive oil, but subsequent presses, in which unhealthy refined vegetable oils are used to extract leftover oil from the olives. The oil which comes close to the chemical composition of olive oil and is freely available in India is sesame (Gingelly) oil. Longest living Japanese populations in Osaka and China eat sesame oil. Ayurveda scholar Charaka promoted sesame oil as the healthiest oil, and many traditional households in several states in India use Sesame oil.

Unhealthy fats – These include partially hydrogenated, refined seed oils available widely in the market, many carrying the labels of “No Cholesterol- Heart healthy.” More refined the seed oil, clearer and thinner in consistency it is. The unhealthiest fats are the trans- fats – dalda, hydrogenated palm oil, and margarine. Trans-fats are human-made fats from vegetable oils by the chemical process of complete hydrogenation. Process of hydrogenation prolongs the shelf life of the vegetable oils. That is the reason that trans fats and hydrogenated oils are used widely in baking and commercially prepared foods such as biscuits, crackers, fried and packaged foods of all kinds. The trans-fats got prohibited in Western countries several years back. Unfortunately, these are widely available in India and are used extensively in the baked, processed, and packaged foods. Public awareness and government regulation are needed urgently to eliminate trans-fats from commercial Indian food markets.