



## Working With Your Body When lifestyle trumps all

Health care and its costs are a major concern today. While politicians and vested interests continue to debate, one thing is clear. ***Lifestyle trumps all the medications and sophisticated treatment available*** when it comes to prevention and health.

The biggest costs we see are ramped up by skyrocketing use of pharmaceuti-

cals and more expensive types of health care while lifestyle factors get little effective attention. Key lifestyle factors are rarely considered in debates. It is time to address our quality of life and the quality of our food supply.

And it's not just about diet.

We are not looking at too many hours worked, ex-

tended commutes, too little physical activity, play and rest. There is too much pressure to do more, while so overwhelmed we actually accomplish less.

This issue of Nutrition Works News addresses ways we can get back to basics: better food, more joyful movement, and more restorative play. I hope you enjoy.

*Bonnie*

## Exercise For Your Brain

Spark by Dr. John J. Ratey (2008) was on my son's required summer reading list *for the parents*. After the double take, I smiled. I anticipated that I already knew a good deal of the current research, but I looked forward to a refresher course. I got more than that.

Ratey addresses much of what I have read, personally experienced and often sensed by intuition. He presents powerful data to motivate each of us to make physical activity an integral part of our lifestyle. Here are a few key points.

- Physical activity helps us learn. Check out the results of Naperville, Ill schools.
- Physical activity allows us to process information, problem solve and manage challenges more effectively. In stressful times we need more time to play, not less.
- Physical activity improves mental health states like depression, anxiety, ADHD and ADD. Regular exercise staves off dementia and Alzheimer's disease.
- Too much physical activity can actually cause more harm than good. Overtraining is a form of stress. Targeted and short term interval training (30-60 seconds of maximum effort 3-4 times in a 20 minute workout) may be better at burning belly fat than enduring long distance running.

Intrigued? Go buy the book. The benefits are far beyond the number of calories burned.

### ***Eating Close to the Earth: Walking the walk, blogging the talk***

It is always sobering when I am tested on a personal level. Today I am challenged with elevated cholesterol. My doctor wants to put me on a statin.

I have family history. Dad was diagnosed with angina at 32, and had five strokes by the time he was 36 years old. He died of congestive heart failure at 44. My mother and grandmother had diabetes. Mom is a cancer survivor.

#### **Inside this issue**

Exercising your brain

1

Eating Close to the Earth: blogging the talk

1

Rethinking Saturated Fats

2

Good food choices: What you can't believe

2

Treating the risks, not the disease

3

What's in a number: how to look deeper

4

I have successfully navigated through an eating disorder, later diagnosing myself with PCOS, and over time I have evolved to a level of conscious eating that belies my past.

Still I am not convinced a statin is the right answer. Follow me as I challenge conventional thinking and look at the deeper issues involved with reducing my risk of disease. Link to my blog here: [www.muchmorethanfood.com/blog.htm](http://www.muchmorethanfood.com/blog.htm)

# Rethinking Saturated Fats: Grass Fed Beef and Dairy Fats Are Different

Barely 3% of all beef sold in the US is grass fed, a puny amount by any measure. But industry watchers say that they expect the rapidly growing industry to provide up to 10% of all beef sold by 2010. Why the sudden interest in grass fed beef?

Grass fed beef and pastured animal products are gaining more scientific attention today. The research has caught my attention.



Maybe feeding animals their natural diet makes all the difference. Grass fed animals enjoy healthier digestive function, emit less methane, and experience less liver disease. They enjoy shinier coats and sweeter smelling breath.

**Conventional nutrition dogma derides animal fat.** Higher carbohydrate, low fat diets are celebrated. In the early 1990's I discovered that a high carbohydrate, low fat diet didn't work for me. Today I know it doesn't work for many people.

I have observed clients lose fat weight, improve cholesterol and other lipids, as well as decrease blood sugars and other signs of disease eating more whole foods. They often eat less total carbohydrate, especially refined grains and sugars, while consuming more protein.

Now I am questioning the dogma about fats. Maybe all saturated fats aren't bad. And quite possibly eating enough of the right kinds of saturated fats is very good.

In the table below, look at the effect on different saturated fats on blood lipids. It is no surprise that trans fats (*trans* 18:1) has the worst impact: increasing LDL

“bad” cholesterol (LDL-C) and decreasing protective HDL cholesterol (HDL-C).

It is common knowledge that olive oil (*cis*18:1) improves HDL-C while decreasing LDL-C.

How interesting that stearic acid (18:0) an eighteen carbon saturated fat found primarily in beef and dairy

products, also lowers the “bad” forms of cholesterol without significantly effecting HDL-C.

Shorter chain (12-14 carbon) saturated fatty acids have significant benefit to the HDL-C levels while simultaneously increasing total and LDL-C. Is this good or bad?

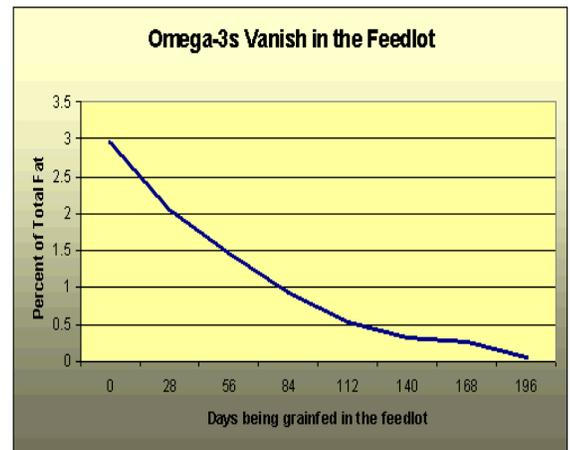
The link between too little HDL-C and overall inflammation has begun to be heard over the din of attention paid to total cholesterol and LDL-C.

Scientists realize that the notion of good fats and bad fats is complicated. Simplistic sound bite nutrition has not made us healthier. We need to examine the impact of grass fed beef and dairy products from grass fed animals on all risk factors.

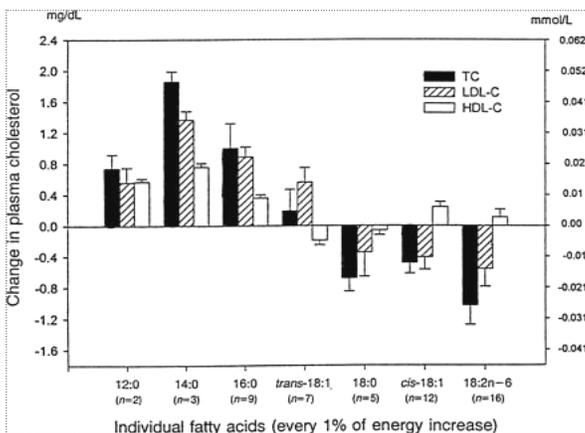
levels are five times greater in grass fed cows compared to cows fed conventional diets. *Dhiman et al (1999), J Dairy Sci 82 (10):2146-56.*

The natural diet and environment for the cattle also means higher vitamins, minerals and antioxidants in the beef. And the benefits don't stop there. The cows are healthier. Ranchers report shinier coats and sweeter smelling breath. The cows are even known to have healthier guts, experience less liver disease, and produce less methane. (*NY Times 6/4/09*)

In a cleaner environment, with plenty of fresh air, their natural feed and less stress, the animals are inherently healthier. They do not develop conditions requiring significant doses of hormones or antibiotics.



Data from: *J Animal Sci (1993) 71(8):2079-88.*



**Grass fed beef is a very different food** than conventionally raised beef. Lower in fat, richer in omega 3 fatty acids and healthy conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), grass fed beef is ironically being touted for its health qualities. The ratio of omega 6 to omega 3 fatty acids worsens every day that the animal eats corn instead of its natural grass diet (see chart to the right). In milk from dairy cows, CLA

**A CASE STUDY** And what can happen when we eat grass fed animal products? One of my clients ate whole fat grass fed beef and dairy products for five months. The results are provocative. Her total cholesterol to HDL-C risk ratio improved from 4.9 to 3.5 Her HDL-C increased from 45 to 68 mg/dl. Over nine months, ultra sensitive CRP levels (measuring inflammation) plummeted from 5.15 (H) to 0.44 mg/L (ref range is 0-3.0).

**Yes, grass fed animal products cost more. But Americans are spending more on health care while eating an adulterated food supply. Maybe paying more for food is a good thing.**

# Good Food Choices: *You can't believe everything that you read*

Supermarkets display an average of 50,000 food items every day, and more than 11,000 new items every year. Most of these items have been processed beyond recognition. Too many foods are overly refined with too much added sugar, salt and fat. We are overwhelmed with an adulterated and abundant food supply.

This same abundance is contributing to an increasing incidence of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and more. Research shows that people exposed to excessive quantity, large portions, and limitless food access consume more. How can consumers make better food choices in this environment?

## NUTRITION PROFILING

Introduce nutrition profiling, short cut logos or shelf markers identifying "healthy" food choices in the marketplace. These systems are supposed to help consumers make better food choices.

Too often they complicate the issue. The



systems are designed by manufacturers, health professionals and other key parties, and there can be conflict of interest.

Two nutritionists designed the system called, "**Guiding Stars.**" One star identifies good food choices; two stars, better food choices; three stars designate best food choices. At Hannaford Foods, a Southeastern supermarket chain, more than 75% of the food items in the store didn't earn a star at all. And they didn't assess candy, gum or liquor.

A panel of nutrition experts and food manufacturers designed "**Smart**

**Choices**". The program attempts to steer consumer choices towards foods rich in nutrients with less salt, sugar and fat. But the loose standards were recently called into question.

Many questionable foods qualified for a smart choice check, including **Lunchables Chicken Dunks, Fruit Roll Ups, Wheat Thins, Fruit Loops and Lucky Charms cereal.**

Critics noted that the Smart Choice cereals contained as much as 50% sugar. The FDA sent a letter of concern to the developers of the program. I recently read the program is being reconsidered.

Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, warns us about product labels that highlight how nutritious a food is. Pollan says, "It probably isn't."

I am glad the FDA is regaining its voice, albeit a tad late in the process. In the long run, it may be better to stick with whole foods—they look like what they are. ♥

## Treating the risks:

### *What happens when we lose sight of what is disease*

In any given week 81% of adults in the US take at least one medication; 27% take at least five. (Sloan Survey, 2005) In 2005, total dollars spent on medication averaged \$6,700 per person per year.

Statins are used to treat elevated cholesterol. The 2005 Sloan Survey ranked atorvastatin (Lipitor), and simvastatin (Zocor), the fourth and eleventh most frequently used prescription drugs, respectively.

In June of 2009, the British Medical Journal published results of a meta-analysis regarding the benefits of statin therapy. It concluded that statins are associated with "significantly improved survival and large reductions in the risk of major cardiovascular events."

This study set a much lower bar for prescribing statins, arguing that "people *at risk* for cardiovascular disease should not be denied the relative benefits of long term statin use."

#### WHAT WERE THE BENEFITS?

During the 4.1 year follow up, the total mortality was 5.7% in the control group and 5.1% in the statin treated group. This represents an absolute risk reduction of 0.6%. In real numbers, for every 174 persons treated, one death was prevented.

Cardiovascular events were decreased by 1.3%. For every 82 persons treated one major coronary event was prevented; for every 245 persons treated one cerebrovascular event (stroke) was prevented.

#### WHAT CAN GO WRONG

We don't really know the effect of long term use of statins. These drugs decrease the cholesterol needed for healthy cell walls and nerve function. There is randomized controlled trial evidence that statins adversely affect some aspects of cognition. Peripheral neuropathy can persist for months after ceasing the medication.

Given the very modest benefit, one re-

viewer concluded, "widespread use of statins in primary prevention is problematic." (Roberts, www.procor.org, 2009)

#### WHERE DOES LIFESTYLE FIT IN?

And what about lifestyle factors? The HALE study shows that following a Mediterranean diet with healthy fats, no smoking, more physical activity and moderate alcohol use is linked to a 50% lower rate of all mortality. Findings from the Nurse's Health Study (2008) suggest that 74% of CVD and 82% of CHD could be prevented with similar lifestyle efforts.

Lifestyle adjustments translate to real risk reduction without the potential harm associated with statins. I wonder how much could be done with \$28 billion a year. §



The best selling drug in history, statins sales totaled \$28 billion in 2006.



**Bonnie Y. Modugno, MS, RD**  
530 Wilshire Boulevard  
Suite 310  
Santa Monica, CA 90401

## *Celebrating food in its rightful place*

Phone: 310-395-4822  
Fax: 310-917-2274  
E-mail: [bonnie@muchmorethanfood.com](mailto:bonnie@muchmorethanfood.com)

Download this and previous editions at  
[www.muchmorethanfood.com](http://www.muchmorethanfood.com)

*Bonnie Y. Modugno, MS, RD, is the founder of Nutrition Works, the nutrition counseling division of More Than Food, Inc. NutritionWorks News is published once a year and highlights key issues that are currently being debated in the food and nutrition environment. The contents of NutritionWorks News is the sole opinion and interpretation of current events and research by Bonnie Y. Modugno, MS, RD. It is distributed to clients, colleagues, friends and family. If you would like to be added or deleted from circulation lists, please contact me directly from options listed on the left.*

## **What's in a number?** **Getting the most from health care**

People continue to identify themselves by their numbers: heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, weight, BMI. There are lots of numbers, but they don't begin to tell the whole story.

Sometimes they tell lies. Too much gets missed when we place too much informational value on a number.

**BLOOD SUGAR** Clients can show a consistently elevated fasting blood glucose, and spend all their time preoccupied with or restricting their food. They may be hardly eating, and the number is still elevated. What does that mean?

Often elevated fasting blood sugars are stress related due to poor sleep quality, inadequate sleep, or restless sleep. It is easy to collapse when we are exhausted, but still tense from the day's activities and unresolved problems.

When we wake during a light sleep cycle, our brain kicks into gear and our muscles are still tense. Blood sugar rises.

**BMI** The body mass index is a simple ratio of height and weight. It doesn't address body composition: how much is fat and how much is lean. Muscular and active people often calculate to an "obese" or "overweight" number.

Ironically, the Center for Disease Control recognizes that people with the greatest longevity most commonly fit in the "overweight" category for BMI status. Health is more about fitness—a parameter that the BMI doesn't assess.

**WEIGHT** is a very crude number with little association with fitness or health—if the research is done right. Overweight is not linked with poor health as much as people think it is.

Lifestyle behaviors are the core factors associated with health: enough physical activity, nutrient dense food choices, managing stress, adequate rest, moderate drinking along with no smoking or abuse of drugs and/or prescription medications.

**CHOLESTEROL** Total cholesterol is a limited screening tool. Even LDL cholesterol needs explanation. Is it big and fluffy or small and dense? The small, dense LDL-C is far more damaging.

HDL-C is probably even more important—a higher number (>40 mg/dl for men; >50 mg/dl for women) indicates an ability to burn fat effectively for fuel. Triglycerides don't get nearly enough attention—lower than 120 mg/dl is better.

**HEART RATE** Lower heart rate (HR) indicates a stronger heart. But active people can experience situations when their resting HR increases. An elevated HR may show the heart is working harder because the individual is over-trained or dehydrated. An investigation is in order.

**The takeaway message here?** It is easy, but not better, to treat to the numbers. Individuals deserve to be evaluated based on their lifestyle. Expect and ask for a more effective approach to health assessment...and better results. §