

## Does Fat Really Make Us Fat?

People have been told that eating foods that have fat in them cause weight gain. The idea started in July of 1976. The U.S Senate sent people into a low-fat craze when they linked heart disease to eating fatty foods. In 1980, the link led to the first set of Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The guidelines were made to help people eat better to prevent heart problems. The guidelines said people should eat very little total fat, almost no saturated fat, and to eat more carbohydrate foods. These include starchy vegetable, rice, breads, noodles and fruits. The message sent to the public was, "fat is bad for you and carbohydrates are good."

The food companies used the guidelines to label their foods, "fat-free and low-fat," to boost sales. People were eating fat-free cookies, pretzels, yogurts, dressings and ice creams thinking they would lose weight. As the guidelines changed every 5 years, ideas about fat did not change much until 2000. Overweight and obesity rates raised quickly from the late 1970's and leveled off around 2000. As studies showed low-fat and fat-free eating was not stopping the growing heart disease rates. People did not know the fat taken out of food was replaced with sugar to keep flavor. People thought "fat-free" and "low-fat" meant snack foods were now good for you. As a result, eating more sugar made people pack on the pounds.

In 2000, the guidelines for fat were changed to, "low saturated fat and moderate in total fat." Over the last 40 years, we have learned that some fats are better than others. Trans-fat, the "bad" fat, has been proven to raise the risk of heart disease. Trans-fat is an unnatural fat used to make food taste good and last longer on grocery-store shelves. We now know 30% of calories should come from monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, and modest amounts of saturated fat.

What does this mean? Eating too many calories is the major cause of weight gain. Also, trans-fat and too much saturated fat is a major cause of heart disease. Eating the right types of fats can be beneficial. We need fat in our diet to support cell growth, cushion our organs, soak up vitamins and keep our body warm.

For more information on weight loss please contact the Minneapolis VA MOVE! Program at 612-629-7388