Metabolic explanation for the lack of heart effects from dietary fat

By ACSH Staff — May 5, 2014

We here at ACSH are happy to give a shout-out to author Nina Teicholz, for her almost-simplified discussion of the metabolic issues pertaining to fat vs. carbohydrate intake and health outcomes, specifically as they relate to heart disease.

Interestingly, we wonder how we would have reacted if her illuminating article, The Questionable Link Between Saturated Fat and Heart Disease, had come out before the huge meta-analysis on this same topic was published in March. As our devoted Dispatch readers will recall (and others can now jump to the link), we noted that the analysis of a total of 659,000 subjects dietary histories and heart disease rates showed this: Their surprising overall finding was a lack of relationship between any specific type of saturated fat, or for the totality of saturated fat intake, and CVD risk.

Ms. Teicholz, who is about to publish a book, The Big Fat Surprise: Why Butter, Meat and Cheese Belong in a Healthy Diet after researching the area for about a decade, explains how the entire medical establishment got sidetracked about 60 years ago, thanks to a number of flawed studies. The campaign against dietary fat was spearheaded by a Dr. Ancel Benjamin Keys in the 1950s and thereafter, and since it made some sort of superficial sense, and since our country was in the early stages of a major upturn in heart disease post-WW2, delicious fatty foods were shunned in favor of grains, fruits, and all forms of carbohydrates. In fact, the epidemic of heart disease was likely a result of the parallel increase in smoking rates of that era, and the anti-fat crusade was eagerly abetted by Big Tobacco (as was the anti-chemical hysteria, with chemicals being blamed for increasing cancer rates at that time).

She explains how the trend toward carbs quite likely accelerated both the obesity problem we have subsequently been fighting and may have increased cancer rates as well, albeit slightly. The flight from fatty foods led to the increased use of vegetable oil, and solidified/hydrogenated products (starting with Crisco in 1911) and the resultant cardio-toxic transfats. She now calls for a return to balanced eating, a long-term mantra of ACSH, with more emphasis on our old fatty friends: bacon eggs and cheese.

ACSH’s Dr. Gil Ross comments: It’s about time! We of course put more stock on the scientific data...
collection we covered in March, but my own experience in clinical medicine agrees with these new approaches. I had a most difficult time getting my patients cholesterol levels down with diet, and was quite pleased when the statin drugs came along in the late 1980s to help reduce dramatically the rates of coronary heart disease and death.