



Reclaiming Your Roots

Reclaiming Your Grandma's Fats

Growing up a child of the late 80s and 90s, I was taught that fat makes you fat. I remember a household filled with Snackwell cookies, Healthy Choice ice cream, and a variety of other high sugar, fat-free processed snacks. As a woman, I was additionally taught to be extremely self-conscious about my weight and appearance, which meant that watching my caloric and fat intake was of the utmost importance. A significant part of my own healing journey has been developing a healthy body image and learning as a grown woman how to eat without shame or guilt, how to stop dieting once and for all. In today's class, my goal is to reshape the way we think about this amazing healing food and finally give ourselves permission to eat it, without fear or shame. Let me be clear: fat does not make you fat.

Fat as a Health Food

Fats from both animal and vegetable sources provide our bodies with a concentrated source of energy and act as building blocks for cell membranes and our hormones. They are literally brain-food. Did you know over 50% of the calories in breast milk are from fat, mostly saturated? Both cholesterol and saturated fat are essential for brain development in babies and children, as well as brain health in adults. In addition, they contain important fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K, and are also needed for mineral absorption, converting carotene into vitamin A, and for many other body processes. Fats also keep us full longer after eating a meal by slowing down nutrient absorption.

Fats or lipids are a class of organic substances that are not soluble in water. Fatty acids are chains of carbon atoms with hydrogen atoms filling the available bonds. They are classified as *Saturated*, *Monounsaturated*, and *Polyunsaturated (Omega 6s and 3s)*. All fats and oils are some combination of these different fatty acids. Animal fats, like butter, lard, and tallow, contain about 40-60% saturated fat and are solid at room temperature. Vegetable oils from northern climates, like sunflower, soy, and canola, contain mostly polyunsaturated fats and are liquid at room temp. Veggie oils from the tropics, like coconut and palm oil are highly saturated and usually hard as butter in our climate.

The Saturated Fat Myth

In the late 1950s, a researcher named Ancel Keys proposed a theory called "the lipid hypothesis," which blamed the rise in heart disease from 1920 (when it was a medical rarity) to 1950 (when it was a leading cause of death amongst Americans) on the consumption of saturated fat and cholesterol. Although subsequent studies pointed out many flaws in his research, the vegetable oil and food processing industries picked up this study and ran with it, continuing to fund further research to support this point. What is most interesting, is that from 1910-1970, the consumption of animal fat in the American diet declined from 83% to 62% and butter consumption from 18 lbs/person/yr to 4. During this same period, the consumption of veggie oils in the form of margarine, shortening (Crisco), and refined oil increased by over 400% and the consumption of sugar and processed foods by about 60%. As a result of Keys' study, our doctors and nutritionists have been telling us for over half a century that polyunsaturated oils (canola, soy, cottonseed) and

hydrogenated oils (margarine, shortening) are good for us, while saturated fats cause cancer and heart disease.

Saturated Fats:

- *Make up at least 50% of the cell membranes*
- *Maintain bone health. For calcium to be properly incorporated in the skeletal structure, at least 50% of dietary fats should be saturated.*
- *Protect the liver from alcohol and other toxins*
- *Enhance immunity*
- *Have antimicrobial properties which can protect against harmful GI critters*

** Evaluation of fat in artery clogs reveals that only about 26% of it is saturated. More than 50% of it is polyunsaturated!*

Cholesterol is a sterol alcohol molecule that is manufactured in the liver and in most human cells. Both the cholesterol our bodies make and consume play a variety of important roles.

- *First and foremost, cholesterol is a natural healing substance our body utilizes to repair damage. When our blood vessels become damaged through irritation from toxins, viruses, etc., cholesterol steps in to the rescue.*
- *Along with saturated fats, it gives our cell membranes their necessary stiffness and stability.*
- *Cholesterol acts as a precursor, or building block, to our stress and sex hormones.*
- *It is a precursor to vitamin D*
- *It composes bile salts which are used to digest and assimilate dietary fats*
- *It acts as an antioxidant, which is probably why cholesterol levels increase with age! This means it helps detoxify our bodies.*
- *It is required for serotonin receptors to operate correctly in the brain. Research has shown that low cholesterol levels can go hand in hand with aggressive or violent behavior and depression.*
- *It plays a vital role in maintaining the strength of the intestinal wall. Low-cholesterol diets can often contribute to leaky gut syndrome and other digestive issues.*

So why do we scapegoat cholesterol? Cholesterol isn't the cause of heart disease. Rather, high serum cholesterol levels are an indicator that the body is dealing with high levels of inflammation, toxicity, and/or other stressors. The cholesterol is just there trying to do some repair work. This is like blaming a patient's broken leg on the doctor who is trying to reset and heal it. When we take a statin or other cholesterol-lowering drug, we are just killing the messenger and not addressing the root cause.

The Bad Fats

When I advise folks to eat more fat, I am not really referring to all fats and oils on the market. The rise of food processing has introduced *high levels of very processed polyunsaturated oils into our diets, such as soy and canola oil (most often GMO)*. In the old days, these oils from fruits, nuts, and seeds were extracted via slow-moving stone presses. Now, these oils are processed in gigantic factories, by crushing the seeds and heating them at 230 degrees. These high temperatures destroy many of the antioxidants and fat-soluble vitamins found in these oils, as well as cause the carbon bonds in these fatty acids chains to break apart, producing free radicals (toxins). Furthermore, to extract the last 10% of these oils, the seed pulp is treated with solvents, most often hexane. Although these toxic solvents are boiled off, their residues remain in the oil.

There is however, a safe modern technique for extracting these oils, using low temperatures and minimal exposure to light and oxygen. *Expeller-pressed, unrefined oils* retain their nutritional integrity and won't go rancid quickly. In general, these oils, such as safflower, sunflower, and canola oil are not meant to be used for heat cooking unless they are labeled *high-oleic*. Cold-pressed, organic olive oils are also a great option.

Hydrogenated Oils are made through a process that turns polyunsaturated oils, which are normally liquid at room temperature, into fats that are solid at room temp., such as margarine and shortening. Usually, the cheapest veggie oils (soy, canola, corn, or cottonseed), which are already rancid from extraction are mixed with tiny metal particles, usually nickel oxide. This mix is then exposed to hydrogen gas in a high-pressure and temperature reactor. Emulsifiers and starch are then squeezed into the mixture to create a better consistency. Finally, the oil is steam-cleaned at high temperatures to remove its unappetizing odor. Its natural color, gray, is removed by bleach and then dyes and artificial flavors are added so it looks more like butter. Tada! I can't believe it's not butter.

Unfortunately, these partially-hydrogenated products are even worse for our bodies than the highly processed oils they are made from. During the hydrogenation process under high temperatures, the nickel catalyst causes the hydrogen atoms in the fatty acid chain to change position. This change results in the formation of *trans fats*. These man-made trans fats are rarely found in nature and are toxic to the body. Instead of eliminating them, however, our body actually incorporates these trans fats into its cell membranes. Consumption of these fats has been linked with: *cancer, high cholesterol, immune system dysfunction, birth defects, diabetes, obesity, and more*. During the 1940s, researchers found a significant correlation between cancer and the consumption of fat. The fats used in these studies were hydrogenated fats but their results were presented using saturated fats as the scapegoat.

The Good Fats

My advice is to include minimally processed fats as part of a healing whole foods diet. This includes meat and animal fats from organic, pastured animals, free range eggs, wild caught fish, nuts, seeds, and expeller-pressed or cold-pressed oils, such as olive oil, sunflower, safflower, and coconut.

Animal Fats: *Lard (Pig), Tallow (Beef), Butter, Ghee, Chicken, Duck Fat* are all amazing animal fats to incorporate into your diet. These are all very stable fats (meaning they don't oxidize at high heats), so they are wonderful to sauté, fry, or bake with. I recommend purchasing these fats from farmers who use organic, pastured practices with their animals. Pig, beef, duck, and chicken fat all must be rendered first to remove excess water and make them a smooth consistency for cooking.

Vegetable Fats: *Raw Coconut Oil & Cold-Pressed Olive Oil* are great vegetable fat for individuals who do not eat meat or want to diversify their fat intake. Olive oil contains about 75% oleic acid (a monounsaturated fat) which has been shown to be beneficial for cardiovascular health. Olive oil is also rich in antioxidants. It's best used cold in salads, drizzled on dishes, or cooked at moderate temperatures (do not fry or high heat). Raw coconut oil is 92% saturated fat and is a great veggie oil for frying and sautéing. It contains large quantities of lauric acid, which has antifungal and antimicrobial properties. Coconut oil also contains caprylic acid which is being shown in research to help alleviate or even reverse the effects of Alzheimers and other neurodegenerative diseases.

Rendering Lard & Tallow

Lard and Tallow are both extremely nourishing animal fats. Both are great sources of Vitamin D, saturated and monounsaturated fat (found in avocados and olive oil and praised for its cardiovascular health benefits). Both fats are also high in B vitamins and other nutrients. What's more, cooking with these oils is much less expensive than buying unrefined coconut and olive oil.

So, down to the nitty-gritty. How do you render these fats to make them nice and smooth for cooking?

Cooking Methods

You have 3 different options for rendering your animal fat: *Crockpot, Stovetop, or Oven*. I prefer the crockpot method, as it allows me to walk away from my lard while it's rendering and not worry about it burning. For this class, we will focus on crockpot rendering.

Kind & Quality of Fat

I recommend purchasing pig or beef fat from animals that have been entirely grass-fed or in the case of pigs, fed non-GMO feed. Toxins accumulate in the fatty tissue of animals (including us!), so it is important to purchase organic meats and fats to limit exposure to these toxins. There are different kinds of fat on these animals, which can affect the quality of lard or tallow you produce. The best fat for rendering is **"leaf fat"** which lies around the pig or cow's kidneys and has the cleanest and mildest flavor. You can also use **"fat back"** from pigs or any type of **suet** (cow fat).

Rendering Process

What you'll need: *4-5 lbs of quality fat (either pig or beef- don't mix!)*

Crockpot or Large Stockpot

½ pint or pint mason jars

Cheesecloth or metal mesh strainer

- 1) Cut fat into small pieces, trimming away any bits of meat, blood, or gristle. I recommend starting with cold fat, as it makes it easier to cut. Once you have cut the fat up into about ½ in pieces, you also have the option of running it through a food processor until it is the consistency of ground meat. This isn't necessary but will reduce rendering time.
- 2) Dump your cut up fat into your crockpot or stockpot and begin heating on LOW. Some folks choose to add a little water at this point, usually ¼ - ½ cup. This is referred to as wet rendering. For dry rendering, you do not add any water. Dry rendering is quicker but can result in burning if your crockpot setting is too hot or you don't watch your stockpot. We generally do wet rendering in our crockpot and have pretty good results.
- 3) If you are using your crockpot, let your fat render on LOW, uncovered for about 1hr. After 1hr, check it to make sure it's not burning. Stirring it periodically is a good idea. As the fat starts to melt, it will separate into liquid and crispy bit, called cracklings which will float to the top. This process can take anywhere from 2-5 hrs in the crockpot. Once the fat is separated like this and your cracklings are settling at the bottom, your rendering is done. Rendering on the stovetop is essentially the same process, but requires you to keep a close eye on your fat. On the stovetop, heat your fat on med-low and stir every 10-15 minutes. You should be able to render your fat down completely within 2 hrs using this method.
- 4) Now it's time for straining! Using a cheesecloth-lined colander or a metal mesh strainer, strain your rendered fat into ½ pint or pint jars, catching the cracklings in the strainer. Allow the lard or tallow to cool on the countertop, cap, and then transfer to the fridge or freezer. For tallow, you can also strain the liquid fat into a parchment paper-lined pyrex dish, allow it to harden and then cut it into bars for storage.
- 5) What to do with all those cracklings? Add 'em to your skillet or throw them back into your crockpot until they are crispy and brown. You can eat them as they are, throw them on salads, or add them to your gravy recipe. The possibilities are endless.

Recipes

Raw Chocolate Bark

1 c raw coconut oil

1 c raw cacao powder

1/3 c maple syrup, raw honey, or coconut nectar

1 tsp vanilla extract

** Optional: chopped nuts, shredded coconut, goji berries, salt, etc.*

- 1) Gently heat coconut oil, whisking in sweetener. Once they are mixed, whisk in cacao powder and vanilla.
- 2) Continue to whisk, while pouring into an ice cube tray or a parchment lined baking sheet or pyrex dish. If you want to add nuts or dried fruit, just place these in the pan or ice cube trays before you pour the chocolate in.

- 3) Cool for at least 30 minutes or more in the fridge or freezer. Remove and pop chocolates out of trays or break into pieces if made as a sheet.
- 4) Enjoy! Store in the fridge when not eating.

Fat Candles

Lard or Tallow

Pint or ½ pint mason jars

Wicks

Essential oils

- 1) Gently melt lard or tallow in a double-boiler on the stovetop.
- 2) Once it has completely melted, remove from stove and allow it to cool but not re-harden. While it is cooling, prepare your mason jars.
- 3) You can use a hot glue gun to glue the wick to the bottom of each jar or hold the wick in place using two pencils laid across the top of the jar.
- 4) Once the fat has cooled, pour it into the mason jars. At this point, you can also choose to add some essential oils, stirring them in. 15 drops per ½ pint or 30 drops per pint candle is plenty. Allow the fat to harden completely and then trim wick if necessary. Enjoy!

*Other Books to Check Out: Nourishing Traditions. Sally Fallon, New Trends Publishing, 2001.
Know Your Fats. Mary Enig, Bethesda Press, 2001.*



Contact Rachel Milford
www.reclaimingyourroots.com
reclaimingyourroots@gmail.com

