



Why Coconut Oil Won't Kill You

Diana Rodgers*

Who Is the American Heart Association?

The American Heart Association was founded by a group of cardiologists in 1924. Its purpose is to fight heart disease and stroke by funding research, promoting certain public health policies and providing education to the public. With heart disease being the leading cause of death in the United States, this is clearly an important work, but their effectiveness is clouded by politics and a questionable interpretation of science. They have repeatedly promoted the replacement of saturated fat with omega-6 (inflammatory) polyunsaturated fats in order to reduce heart disease risk, a recommendation that simply has not been supported by current research.

Additionally, as with any non-profit organization, the AHA needs money. The best place to get money is from corporate sponsors, which for them include Subway, Cheerios, and Bayer. In addition, the AHA allows companies to purchase a "seal of approval", known as the Heart Check Program, that can be put on certain food products that meet specific criteria. Some of these products include Honey Nut Cheerios, Orange Juice, and V8 Fusion. The products endorsed by this program are generally high in refined carbohydrates and contain a lot of sugar. Not to mention, only the companies who can afford to pay the fee for the "Heart Check" label are allowed to use it on their packaging. Even for a non-profit, that many corporate connections make me question the validity of their claims and how they are analyzing the available data on heart disease.

The Problem with Nutrition Research

It's not a surprise the AHA was able to spin the current research to match their overall message. Nutrition research is confusing because of a variety of problems with how research is conducted and analyzed. Here are some general reasons why it is almost impossible to conduct the type of double-blind, research study necessary to determine cause and effect in the area

The part of the report of "Presidential Advisory" on dietary fats released from the American Heart Association (AHA) seems to be making the most news around the internet is that coconut oil is unhealthy. Headlines like "Coconut Oil is as Bad as Butter", "Coconut Oil is Unhealthy and Has Never Been Healthy cause increased confusion for the general population, for those who understand the nuances and politics behind the AHA's statement it's absolutely infuriating. Diana Rodgers writes a rebuttal and present some actual facts about why their latest advice, and their continued promotion of inflammatory foods like margarine .

of nutrition:

Funding for research is provided by government organizations or corporations. This influences the type of research that is funded and the types of findings that come out of research as a result.

People lie about what they eat. Unless you lock people up and control every aspect of their diet, it is impossible to determine exactly what someone is eating. Food records, food frequency questionnaires, and interviews are all inaccurate.

Most nutrition research is based on epidemiological data that can only show correlations, or connections, and cannot determine causation between two variables. For example, the number of films Nicolas Cage has been in correlates with the number of people who have drowned falling into a pool.

Saturated Fat and Heart Disease

In recent years, there have been 17 meta-analyses and systematic reviews conducted that have not found a clear link between saturated fat intake and heart disease. Of those that reviewed clinical trials on the subject, (instead of just epidemiological studies) not one found any connection between saturated fat intake, heart disease, and mortality. You can see a great summary of several of the studies on this topic here. Oddly enough, the AHA's "in-depth analysis" only utilized four studies, some from the 1960s, to draw their conclusions. In their paper, they state only these four were "good enough" to be included. One famous study is the Framingham Heart Study.

"In Framingham, Massachusetts, the more saturated fat one ate, the more cholesterol one ate, the more calories one ate, the lower people's serum cholesterol...we found that the people who ate the most cholesterol, ate the most saturated fat, ate the most calories weighed the least and were the most physically active." Dr William Castelli 1992 (Director of the Framingham Heart Study).

Regardless of the AHA cherry picking data to support their recommendations, the bottom line is that there's no strong data connecting saturated fat and cardiovascular disease. Therefore, demonizing coconut oil (or any other type of saturated fat) as the cause of heart disease is simply not supported by available research.

High LDL May Not be Harmful

The AHA based a lot of their recommendations on the effect saturated fats have on increasing LDL cholesterol. But, they make no differentiation in their article between the size of the particles. It has been

The Benefits of Coconut Oil

There are several benefits outlined in the research about coconut oil in the diet, which are not mentioned in the AHA paper. Here are a few of the highlights:

- Coconut oil may actually help improve cholesterol and blood lipids
- Coconut oil has been found to help people lose weight and reduce waist circumference.
- Coconut oil has anti-microbial and anti-viral properties.
- Coconut oil is anti-inflammatory, helping reduce the risk of heart disease.

shown that large LDL particles do not increase risk of cardiovascular disease, whereas small, dense particles do. Also, it has been repeatedly shown that an increase in saturated fat intake does raise LDL, but only the large, fluffy kind, not the harmful dense LDL. Also, when we eat saturated fat, HDL cholesterol levels go up, which is protective to our hearts, reducing the risk of heart disease.

The Sustainability of Coconut Oil

As a sustainability advocate, I do want to make one note about sustainability and coconut oil. Although there are benefits to health, there are other types of fats such as butter, lard, or other animal fats that may be from sources closer to you. Coconuts are generally shipped from Central or South America in order to arrive on our shelves here. In fact, it's a traditional food to many in Ecuador, who are now following the AHA advice and have swapped this nutrient dense fat for vegetable oils. Since this change and their adoption of a more Western diet, many who used to consume large amounts of coconut oil have seen a health decline. Consider including other, local and more sustainable sources of fat. For those of us in America, this means butter and other animal-based fats.

Overall, take the recommendations of the AHA with a grain of salt. Although I am not a fan of dumping expensive MCT oil in your coffee, I also don't think we all need to throw out our coconut oil. Focus on eating real food, including coconut oil, butter and other traditional fats. Please do not avoid healthy fats in favor of margarine, as the AHA recommends. Real, whole, environmentally sustainable food will always be healthy, regardless of what the latest report may claim.

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Source: <http://sustainabledish.com/coconut-oil-wont-kill-listening-american-heart-association-might>