Avocados are fatty ? Are they healthy? [1]

Alice,

What about avocados? I know they don’t contain any cholesterol, but they are high in fat so I have avoided them. Now, however, I am reading that the kind of fat they do contain may be useful in lowering cholesterol. Do you have any further information on this?

? Guacamole

Answer

Dear Guacamole,

No need to pause that chip in midair, or order sushi sans avocado! Avocados are indeed high in fat, but they’re high in monounsaturated fat, the good fat, the kind of fat that may actually help lower blood cholesterol levels. And as you rightly said, avocados contain no cholesterol ? no plant foods do.

You may have heard the term low-density lipoproteins (LDL) in the discussion of different types of cholesterol. LDL cholesterol is often referred to as bad cholesterol because when the body has too much it can form plaque on the walls of arteries and veins which can cause heart attack or stroke. In contrast, high-density lipoproteins (HDL) clear the blood stream and artery walls of LDL and transport it to the liver where it can be broken down and eliminated. Lowering LDL and increasing HDL is considered desirable in terms of preventing heart disease and stroke. The good news in terms of those tasty avocados is that eating monounsaturated fats, especially while decreasing intake of carbohydrates and saturated fats, may decrease levels of LDL and raise HDL cholesterol.

The American Heart Association [2] recommends that total fat intake be kept to 25 to 35 percent of your daily calories and that saturated fat comprise less than seven percent of total daily calories. That means it's suggested that the remaining fat come from monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat sources like nuts, seeds, fish and vegetable oils. Translated into layman's terms this would mean that a typical 2,000 calorie a day diet would include 50 to 70 grams of fat, with about 34 to 50 grams of that fat from poly- or monounsaturated sources and about 16 grams or less from saturated sources. Because it's hard to keep track of exactly how many grams of fat are coming from which sources, it's a good rule of thumb to choose unsaturated over saturated fats whenever presented the option. Saturated fats come from animal products like meat, seafood, milk, butter, cheese, and ice cream. Monounsaturated fats come from vegetarian sources like nuts, seeds, vegetable oils, olives, and, drum roll...
In addition to containing healthful fat, avocados are also high in beta carotene, fiber, folate (a B vitamin), and potassium (ounce for ounce, avocados have 60 percent more potassium than bananas). To put the fat in perspective, avocados have less fat than lean beef per ounce, and a whole Haas avocado has less fat than three tablespoons of Italian salad dressing. While it's a good idea to take all fats in moderation, rather than shun the guacamole bowl at the party, help yourself to some of the green gooeyness, along with plenty of veggies, fruits, and whole grains. Enjoy!

Alice!

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