

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,

There's no need to pause that guacamole-filled chip in midair or reconsider ordering avocado toast at brunch. While it might concern you that avocados are high in fat, you may be relieved to hear that it's a *nutritious* kind of fat, monounsaturated fats! These fats, which promote lower blood cholesterol levels, assist with blood sugar maintenance (especially for people with type-II diabetes), and contain vitamin E ? a crucial antioxidant that supports a robust immune system whilst simultaneously protecting your vision. Furthermore, avocados are rich in nutrients that can positively impact your long-term health. Fat aside, you're absolutely right that avocados contain no cholesterol ? no plant foods do. They *do*, however, help to lower blood cholesterol levels as they are packed with high-density lipoproteins (HDL), which help lower the amount of low-density lipoproteins (LDL), in the bloodstream.

But wait ? hit rewind, there are different kinds of cholesterol? Yes; LDL cholesterol is often considered less-than-healthy because, when eaten in excess, it can encourage the buildup of plaque on the walls of the arteries (atherosclerosis). This plaque can eventually create a blockage and prevent effective blood flow throughout the body, increasing the risk of heart attack or stroke. In contrast, HDL cholesterol (the kind in avocados), clears the blood stream and artery walls of LDL (thereby decreasing the likelihood of plaque build-up), and transports the LDL to the liver to be broken down and eliminated. Given that avocados contain high amounts of HDL, it's among many foods that contribute to a healthy cholesterol ratio.

What else can avocados do? Researchers have found relationships between eating avocados and having a lower body weight, body mass index ^[2], waist circumference, and risk of lower metabolic syndrome (a group of risk factors for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes). However, in order to increase the likelihood of reaping these benefits, it's recommended that folks cut down on foods rich in saturated fats, and eat more foods rich in mono- and polyunsaturated fats. For more on the different types of fats, check out Good vs. bad fats ^[3] in

the *Go Ask Alice!* archives. But, in case you're wondering which food sources contain which kinds of fats, here's the 411:

- **Monounsaturated fats** come from vegetarian (plant) sources such as nuts, seeds, vegetable oils, olives, and, drum roll please? avocados.
- **Polyunsaturated fats** come from both vegetarian (plant) and animal sources such as fatty fish (e.g., salmon, tuna, trout), walnuts, flaxseed, corn, soybean oil.
- **Saturated fats** come from animal products such as meat, seafood, milk, butter, cheese, and ice cream.

When considering whether or not you want to eat avocados, it can be worthwhile to look beyond their fat content. Avocados are high in beta-carotene, folate (a B vitamin), and potassium (ounce for ounce, avocados have 60 percent more potassium than bananas). As compared to other fruits, avocados contain less sugar, and the sugar it does contain (D-Mannoheptulose) may potentially help with weight management and blood glucose control. The oil and water composition of avocados makes the avocado itself, as well as the other fruits and vegetables it is being eaten with more bioavailable. This means that putting an avocado in a salad may help your body absorb more nutrients from the other vegetables than it would without it. Finally, avocados are rich in dietary fiber and phytosterols, both of which may further lower a person's cholesterol levels, beyond HDL's impact.

Being thoughtful about how your dietary choices impact your overall fat intake is wise, particularly if you're trying to monitor how much fat you eat every day. As per the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS), it's recommended that individuals limit their total fat intake to around 25 to 35 percent of their daily calories, with only five to six percent of that coming from saturated fats. For a more personalized breakdown, as well as food recommendations, the American Heart Association has a nifty [My Fats Translator](#) [4] that you can check out. If you would prefer something even more tailored to your needs, you may wish to consider speaking with a registered dietician about any specific dietary needs and establish a unique meal plan that's just right for you.

Understandably, it can be hard to keep track of exactly how many grams of fat are coming from which sources ? especially when you're not preparing your meals yourself or don't have quick and easy access to nutrition facts. In those kinds of situations, a helpful and healthier shortcut can be to choose unsaturated over saturated fats whenever you have the option. The great news is that those delicious avocados can fit snugly into your daily fat intake whilst providing you with a plethora of nutrients and potential health benefits to follow ? they have enough nutrients to guac your world!

Alice!

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