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**Men's Health** TONS OF  
USEFUL STUFF

## Stop Blaming Saturated Fat

The research is clear: Carbohydrates, not fats, are the foe in America's battle against heart disease and obesity

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The recent news that the Atkins low-carb diet works well *and* improves health has some people scratching their heads.

If Atkins means eating lots of meat, eggs and cheese, won't all that saturated fat wreck your cholesterol levels and put you on the road to heart disease?

Well, no. There's no good evidence of that. And there's plenty of evidence that the opposite is true--that eating more saturated fat *lowers* the risk for heart disease. That's what a recent Harvard University study found: People who had the highest saturated fat intake also had the *least* plaque buildup on their artery walls. The *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* described the findings as an "American Paradox."

In the Stanford University study that made recent headlines, women on the "fatty" Atkins diet ended up with the healthiest cholesterol levels and the best blood pressure readings, compared to those on other diets, notably the famous Ornish low-fat diet.

Here are a few bullet-points summarizing the current research on saturated fats.

--We typically eat more than a dozen kinds of saturated fat. Some have zero effect on cholesterol. Some raise bad (LDL) cholesterol, but all of them raise good (HDL) cholesterol to a greater extent. That's a net gain in heart health.

--The nation's top health organizations have for decades called saturated fat one of the main culprits for diet-related diseases, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Problem is, this blame stems from research that is now seen as incomplete. For instance, a famous 1953 study took data from six countries, overlooking 16 countries whose numbers provide contradictory evidence. (Like France, for instance, or native cultures in Africa and Canada where high amounts of fat and saturated fat are eaten but heart disease is practically unknown.)

--Since the 1970s, American men have decreased their saturated fat intake by 14 percent and increased their carbohydrate intake by 23 percent--yet rates of obesity and heart disease are increasing. You might say that carbohydrates make people fat, which leads to heart disease. Or that more carbohydrates you eat, the greater your risk for a heart attack.

--But these simple numbers only *suggest* a cause. To prove something, you need a controlled experiment. There have been many such clinical trials, and *not one* has shown has shown that cutting back on saturated fat reduces heart disease risk.

--When you look at the effect of saturated fat on health, you must also look at the intake of carbohydrates. Many studies have shown that if you replace carbs with fat, your triglycerides levels go down and your good cholesterol goes up. And your bad (LDL) cholesterol particles get bigger, which means they're less harmful.

--Here's a paradox for you: A high saturated fat intake *decreases* blood levels of saturated fat. How can this be? Here's how: The saturated fat in your blood comes from both the food you eat and from your liver, which produces saturated fat. The more carbs you eat, the higher your insulin levels climb, which signals your liver to produce saturated fat. If you go on a low-carb diet, your insulin levels drop, and so does production of saturated fat.

--A bonus: with low insulin levels, your body can burn more fat for energy, decreasing your sat-fat levels even more.

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