



How Healthy is Cheese?

Cheese is one of the foods I struggle with the most. Here in the heart of wine country, cheese seems like the ideal food companion to wine. We have local artisan varieties that taste wonderful. It seems like a good, healthy, solid food. Yet there are many reasons to be cautious about how much you eat.



The American Heart Association, which is generally conservative, recommends limiting saturated fats to 7% of total calorie intake. Remember that saturated fats that come from animal sources are “atherogenic” meaning they contribute to hardening of the arteries. They also lead to elevated cholesterol levels, and keep cell membranes rigid.

If you usually eat 2000 calories, 7% of that is 140 calories. Fats contain 9 calories per gram, so 140 calories yields 15.55 grams of saturated fat. Chicken breast, without skin, is only 0.3 grams of saturated fat per ounce. Steak will run around 2.33 grams per ounce (so 6 ounces would come close to using up your saturated fat allowance for the whole day). But cheese contains 4-6 grams *per ounce!* It is a concentrated source of saturated fat.

Cheese consumption has skyrocketed in the last 20 years. Many restaurant meals are drowning in it. It shows up in omelets, salads, sandwiches, burgers, and is a favorite snack food. When dieters want more protein, they reach for cheese. No wonder it is so satisfying – all that fat!



Skim milk mozzarella and has 3 grams of saturated fat per ounce string cheese has 3-4 grams. Parmesan has 5 grams of saturated fat per ounce, but one tablespoon of grated parmesan only has 1 gram (it is fluffy, so 1 tbsp is about 1/5 of an ounce). Low fat cheeses range between 1-3 grams of saturated fat per ounce. Read the label—some of these cheeses have less total fat but not less saturated fat.

Cheese substitutes are another alternative, and are especially good if you don't tolerate dairy or are vegan. For example, Lisanatti makes various cheeses using almond, rice or soy as a base. They contain 1-3 grams of total fat and 0 saturated fat per ounce.

Cheese is still one of my favorite foods. I've cut my own intake significantly, and mostly use it in small amounts to add flavor. I enjoy full fat versions as an occasional treat, although even then when possible I choose local products from small farms with goats or cows that are likely to be grass fed. Yet I always have to watch myself; if I don't pay attention, my cheese consumption creeps upward.

As you decide where cheese fits into your diet, make it a conscious choice and be cognizant of the amount of total fat and saturated fat it contains. Read labels. It doesn't have to be all or none: you can choose to enjoy it in moderation in the forms you like the most and limit the rest.

Are the Calories Worth It?

As we ease into autumn, the food holidays are right around the corner. It can become very tempting to overeat as treats start showing up with increased frequency, starting with Halloween candy.

Often we'll eat a food that we aren't even that crazy about – just because it's there. You can change this by becoming more aware and asking yourself a couple of key questions.

Is this a food that you really enjoy? If yes, do you want to eat it now, and if so, how much? You don't have to have an automatic “no” (although there are times you might!) – but do make a conscious choice: do you want this now?

If it is not a food that is particularly important to you, do you really want to waste your calories on it? If you were to indulge in extra calories, would you rather wait for something that you like much better?

When you ask these questions, suddenly the food that others are eating is much less tempting. Thinking it through this way can make it much easier to pass up, without feeling deprived! It is all about making a conscious choice instead of automatically eating something just because it's there.

Recipes for the Month

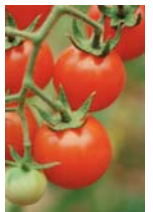
[Barbequed Veggie Pasta](#)

[Rice and Lentil Bowl](#)

And a favorite from the past that uses ripe tomatoes:

[Roasted Tomatoes: preserving summer](#)

Click the links to the recipe, or find them on my blog at www.HealthyHabitsCoach.wordpress.com.



Healthy Fats: Understanding the Omega-3 and Omega-6 Connection and More

For more information on saturated fat contents of various foods, check out my book: [Healthy Fats](#). It is easy to read and loaded with helpful information.

Available at: www.HealthyHabitsCoach.com

Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

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