

FAT: A Health Food?

The recent movie “Julie and Julia” resurrected America’s love affair with our very own “first lady” of French cooking, Julia Child. So much so, that her infamous cookbook, “Mastering the Art of French Cooking” has finally topped the best-seller book lists, 48 years after its initial publication.

And when most of us think of Julia Child, we think of butter. Real butter. And cream (real cream) and all sorts of animals fat (duck, goose, bacon). Fat is the path to flavor and is used liberally in nearly every recipe she tackled.

Although many of today’s dieticians are probably cringing at the celebration of butter and fat that goes along with the resurrection of Julia Child, perhaps this is an opportunity to take a closer look at “good fats”—ones that are actually essential (in moderation) to our overall well-being.

Fat is a macronutrient that helps our bodies in countless ways. It is necessary for our normal growth and development, for absorbing certain vitamins (A, D, E, K, and carotenoids), for boosting the performance of the brain, eyes, and lungs, for protecting our vital organs, for maintaining cell membranes, and much more. Fats are especially important for pregnant women, since they are integral to fetal brain development. Some fats are even known to ease inflammation, and help our metabolism and immune system stay healthy and functioning.

Additionally, fat is the most concentrated source of energy we can consume, as we burn it quickly and do not store it. Both the USDA and the American Heart Association recommendation 20-35 percent of our daily calories should come from fat—“good fat,” that is.

Good fats are unsaturated (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated) and generally come from vegetable sources such as plant oils (olive, canola, vegetable, flax, soybean, sunflower), avocados, nuts, seeds, and fatty fish including salmon, trout, and herring. These sources have been shown to actually decrease the risk of developing heart disease.

Bad fats, on the other hand, have been shown to increase the risk of heart disease. These include saturated fats in meat, lard, whole-milk cheeses, cream, and (block your ears, Julia Child lovers) butter. These fats should be consumed in moderation, meaning less than 7 percent of total daily calories.

The other “bad fat” is the ultra-unhealthy trans fat found in pre-mixed products (cakes, pancakes, and chocolate drinks), baked goods, snack foods, fried foods, and margarines. These have been shown to raise blood cholesterol and should be avoided as much as possible.

When shopping, steer clear of products that list “partially hydrogenated oil” in the ingredients. Also, if you must purchase processed foods, try to select those with unhydrogenated oil rather than partially hydrogenated or hydrogenated vegetable oils or saturated fat. Also, when eating out, avoid fried foods, biscuits, and other baked goods—unless you are certain the restaurant does not use trans fat.

Bon appétit! 



Red and Green Bell Pepper Bites

(Serves 8; 3 pieces per serving)

Flavorful toasted almonds and lemon-pepper contrast nicely with crisp bell pepper pieces in this appetizer from the American Heart Association.

INGREDIENTS

1 medium green bell pepper
1 medium red bell pepper
¼ c sliced almonds
4 oz fat-free or reduced-fat cream cheese, softened
1 tsp no-salt lemon pepper seasoning
1 tsp fresh lemon juice

Cut each pepper in half lengthwise; discard stems, ribs, and seeds. Cut each half into six pieces and arrange on a platter with the skin side down.

Dry-roast almonds over medium heat until golden brown (3–4 min). Reserve 1 Tbs for garnishing. Process remaining almonds in a food processor until finely ground (15–20 sec).

Beat cream cheese, lemon pepper seasoning, and lemon juice with an electric mixer until creamy (1–2 min). Add ground almonds and beat until combined (10 sec).

Snip corner off a resealable plastic bag and spoon in mixture. Pipe 1 tsp of mixture onto each bell pepper piece. Garnish with the sliced almonds.

Nutritional Analysis (per serving)

Calories: 39	Cholesterol: 3mg
Total Fat: 1.5g	Sodium: 71mg
Saturated Fat: 0.0g	Carbs: 3g
Trans Fat: 0.0g	Fiber: 1g
Polyunsat. Fat: 0.5g	Sugars: 2g
Monounsat. Fat: 1.0g	Protein: 3g