

Tip of the Day:

Don't Have Too Much of a Good Thing

While it's true that some foods can fight disease and may help you live longer, many of us forget that just because a food is healthy doesn't mean it's calorie free. In fact, eating too much of some foods can cancel the very benefit they provide. Here are two foods known for their health benefits — I'll tell you how to keep them healthy.

Olive Oil

The Good: The Food and Drug Administration recently permitted a qualified health claim to be made for olive oil. Manufacturers are now allowed to state on the label: "Limited and not conclusive scientific evidence suggests that eating about 2 tablespoons (23 grams) of olive oil daily may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease due to the monounsaturated fat in olive oil."

The Bad: The allowable claim goes on to say: "To achieve this possible benefit, olive oil is to replace a similar amount of saturated fat and not increase the total number of calories you eat in a day." Why? Because oil has about 120 calories per tablespoon. So if you don't use it as a replacement but *add* the 2 tablespoons to your daily calories, you could put on about 25 pounds in a year! And keep in mind that "light" olive oil does not have fewer calories — it just has a lighter color.

Oatmeal

The Good: You've probably seen food labels or TV commercials touting oatmeal as a food that's able to help you lower your cholesterol. That's because oats contain soluble fiber. Research has shown that soluble fiber (beta-glucans) helps lower blood cholesterol levels and reduces the risk of heart disease when included in a diet that is also low in saturated fat and cholesterol. The 3 grams per day of oat beta-glucan needed to lower cholesterol can be obtained by eating 1 1/2 cups of cooked oatmeal (3/4 cup of uncooked oatmeal), or roughly three packets of instant oatmeal. Eating this amount typically lowers total cholesterol by up to 23 percent.

Besides helping to lower your cholesterol, oats are just plain healthy, providing protein, iron, insoluble fiber, and other nutrients — and they have only 145 calories per cup (cooked). As for their effect on weight control, studies show that an increase in intake of either soluble or insoluble fiber helps you feel full longer, thereby decreasing your subsequent hunger.

Finally, oats are naturally free of cholesterol and low in saturated fat and sodium.

The Bad: The problems start when we add the extras — brown sugar, butter, salt, honey, whole milk and/or fruit (which is not bad in moderation). Too many add-ons bring up the total fat, cholesterol, and calories beyond what would be considered a healthy breakfast.

Fit Tip: Stick to a cup and a half of cooked oatmeal (218 calories) and throw in half a cup of frozen blueberries (35 calories), which are also high in antioxidants. Or toss in three-quarters of a cup of frozen mixed berries, for 70 additional calories. Also, add your own cinnamon or nutmeg to plain oatmeal rather than buying the flavored versions, which come with added sugar.