Wellness Minute
Health Information You Can Use On Your Path To Wellness

Pros & Cons of Seed Oils

"Seed oils accounted for approximately 1% of total calories in 1865 and have increased to 25% of total calories by 2010."

Reducing seed oils is the latest nutrition fad, so I know many of you must be thinking, "I've always been told to use plant oils and now you're telling me oils from seeds are bad." Here's the big picture. Some examples of seed oils are corn, safflower, sunflower, soy, or canola. We need healthy oils or fats to make hormones, enzymes, and for our cell membranes. But too much of even a good thing can become a bad thing.

Much of the oils we ingest move into cellular covers called membranes. I've heard multiple researchers share that the cell membrane is more important than the nucleus of the cell. Cells can live for a time without a nucleus, but they can't live without cell membranes. We have membranes inside our cells as well, like our mitochondria, which has an inner and outer membrane. Membranes signal the internal parts of our cells to repair, regenerate, and heal. If our cells are not repairing, the result is continued and sustained inflammation. Inflammation is really the inability of our cells to repair. If cells can't repair, they perform at suboptimal levels. And isn't that what aging and chronic disease looks like? As systemic inflammation levels increase… pain, healing time, fatigue, brain fog, and digestive issues all increase.

Seed oils have a higher percentage of linoleic acid, which is an omega 6 fat. The plant source of omega 3 is called alpha linolenic acid. You may have heard that genetically the ratio of omega 6 fats to omega 3 fats, is between 1:1 and 4:1 depending on who you are reading. But now, because of processed foods, most Americans have a ratio of omega 6:3 fats of 15:1, and people with chronic disease often measure 25:1, some even higher. Knowing this ratio exists, many clinicians have turned to just increasing omega 3 in the form of fish oil. And that's important, but reducing linoleic acid, particularly processed, denatured linoleic acid, from seed oils is beginning to emerge as a concurrent strategy.

When in excess, omega 6 oils cause inflammation, and now, the average American is getting at least 10-15 times the amount they have received for thou-

sands of years. To look at it another way, seed oils accounted for approx-imately 1% of total calories in 1865 and have increased to 25% of total calories by 2010. So, to be clear, we need linoleic acid, but we don't need it in the ultra-processed volume that we are consuming today.

Here's a concept that I never really considered. Saturated fats do not contain double bonds. Monounsaturated fats have one double bond and are missing one pair of hydrogen atoms. Polyunsaturated fats have 2 double bonds and are missing more than one pair of hydrogen atoms. Healthy monounsaturated and poly-unsaturated fats are more prone to oxidation, which create free radicals. Consider how fats are processed, heated, hydrogenated, or chemicalized to preserve them, and you have fats that are prone to become free radicals. Now, let's take that fat and take it out of 1:1 balance, and you can see why too much of a good oil can sabotage one's health.

And when we knowingly or unknowingly ingest toxins from our environment, it's easy to see why inflammation is rampant. We discussed earlier that fats move into cell membranes and the disproportionate ratio of fats will cause membrane to function at a lower capacity. The energy factories of our cells, the mitochondria contain both an inner and outer membrane. Mitochondria naturally create free radicals as they create and store energy as ATP. If the membranes and internal organelles of our cells become damaged, these amazing energy producers can't manufacture, store, and trans-port ATP properly. Less energy means less cellular repair, which translates into fatigue, inflammation, mood changes, brain fog, diges-tive issues, leaky gut, immune impairment, etc.

We always think of mitochondria as energy producing organelles, but another key function is the ability to signal cell suicide or apoptosis to destroy dysfunctional cells. Here's the problem: almost all processed foods contain high levels of seed oils. That means chips, sauces, mayon-naise, salad dressings, and anything fried will involve seed oils, unless you make them yourself at home. And of course, most rest-aurants are using cheaper omega 6 fats to cut costs. If you are experiencing pain or inflam-mation, try cutting out as many seed oils and processed foods as you can for 2 full weeks. Your wellness clinician can recommend an anti-inflammatory diet and will probably suggest a fish oil product to help the ratio of omega 6:3 as we discussed. Most patients are surprised at how much better they feel, even in just 2 weeks.