

A recent study has shown most people in the U.S. do not understand the benefits of consuming unsaturated fats in moderation - found in such foods as avocados, olives and nuts - in moderation.

The Hass Avocado Board (HAB) surveyed more than 1,000 adults and concluded that despite years of efforts by numerous organizations to educate consumers on the differences between unsaturated ("good") and saturated ("bad") fats, more than half had no idea.

The survey found 42% of people incorrectly thought all fats played a role in increased cholesterol levels, while this percentage rose to 51% when including those who gave "don't know/unsure" responses.

Worse still, one in three people believed unsaturated fats such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats were bad and ought to be reduced or eliminated from the diet. In addition, 18% of people interviewed mistakenly thought trans fats were good fats.

This is in contradiction with the Dietary Guidelines published by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which claims unsaturated fats can help reduce blood cholesterol if they are eaten in moderation and are used to replace saturated or trans fats.

"It is clear from the survey that more consumer education is needed on the differences between good and bad fats, and the role they play in people's diets," said Penny Kris-Etherton from Penn State University.

"The different types of fats can be confusing to consumers, but all fats are not created equal and the impact on one's health can be significant.

While consumers don't yet understand the difference very well, they do appear to get that avocados are a source of good fat. Women have a better understanding of this at a rate of 87% compared to men with 80%. And also on the brighter side, 39% of respondents



Photo: Hass Avocado Board

identified monounsaturated fats as good; a slightly higher percentage than those who felt the same about polysaturated fats (37%).

"Good fats, like monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, are an important part of a balanced diet," said celebrity fitness trainer Harley Pasternak, who is working with HAB on its "Love One Today" campaign promoting awareness of the benefits of eating fresh avocados.

"Protein, fiber and fats, like the naturally good fats found in avocados, are a good way to keep you full between meals."

"It is a misconception that you should not eat avocados because they are high in fat. Avocados can fit into a wide range of healthy eating plans," added Kris-Etherton.

Less than a third of survey respondents said they felt more educated today about which foods to eat and which to avoid. A quarter of people said they did not really pay attention to this type of information.

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