

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE, IS THERE FIRE?



I'm sure you remember the controversial meta-analysis published in the March issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine* that found no clear association between saturated fat consumption and higher heart disease risk and unsaturated fat consumption and lower heart disease risk. The study, which is part of a growing body of research questioning the link between saturated fat and heart disease, sparked a contentious debate among medical research scientists and nutrition experts.

Many medical researchers were up in arms about the study because it contradicted a large evidence base represented in the 2013 AHA/ACC Guideline on Lifestyle Management to Reduce Cardiovascular Risk, a comprehensive report from the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association that associates heart health with dietary patterns low in saturated fats and heart disease with dietary patterns high in saturated and trans fats.

Many scientists questioned the veracity of the study design, pointed out inaccuracies in the findings, and even demanded the study be retracted. The research wasn't retracted, but the study authors did correct some of their conclusions to reflect current evidence that wasn't part of their analysis.

I'm no scientist, and this could be a prime example of shoddy research, but I do have some questions. How can medical researchers and diet and nutrition experts come to very different conclusions about the role of saturated fats in the development of cardiovascular disease and stroke after examining the same volume of evidence? Could it be possible that not all saturated fat is created equal, as some research involving coconut oil and dairy suggests?

This controversy brings to mind the adage, "Where there's smoke, there's fire," meaning that maybe, just maybe, there's some truth somewhere in the research that's questioning saturated fat's association with heart disease and stroke. Is it reasonable to think that maybe the medical community should look at the evidence of the contradictory camp a bit more closely to determine why it has come to its conclusions so a true consensus can be established? I may be naïve, but I'd like to think the medical community could work together toward this end. Share your thoughts about this ongoing controversy on *Today Dietitian's* Facebook and Twitter pages, and please enjoy the issue!

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