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Beef Tallow: Is It Really a Health Food?

Beef tallow has resurged in popularity, promoted as a natural, nutrient-rich alternative to vegetable oils. Its inclusion among cooking fat options in the 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) has further elevated its profile (1). Advocates highlight its monounsaturated fatty acids and purported micronutrient benefits (2). However, current evidence does not support choosing beef tallow over unsaturated plant oils for cardiovascular health.

Beef tallow is melted and strained to generate purified beef fat. One tablespoon (approximately 13 g) provides about 115 calories and 6.4 g of saturated fatty acids (SFA) which accounts for nearly half its total fat content (3). Four tablespoons provide approximately 25 g of SFA, exceeding the recommended daily limit of less than 10% of total energy for a 2,000-calorie diet (1). A serving of beef tallow supplies less monounsaturated fat than a serving of olive or canola oil (4). Randomized feeding trials demonstrate that replacing saturated fat with unsaturated fat lowers low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C), a causal risk factor for atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) (5). In fact, studies specifically examining beef fat have found higher LDL-C when it replaces unsaturated oils (2). Moreover, large prospective cohort studies associate replacing saturated fat with polyunsaturated fat with lower total and cardiovascular mortality (6).

In addition, beef tallow's micronutrient content does not support the claims of its nutritional superiority (2,3). Supporters often tout its vitamin E, choline, and vitamin D content. One tablespoon of beef tallow contains 0.346 mg of vitamin E, 10.2 mg of choline, and 3.58 IU of vitamin D (3). While one serving (3 oz) of salmon, high in unsaturated fatty acids, provides more vitamin E (1 mg), choline (75mg), and vitamin D (~800 IU), than beef tallow (7-9).

Current cardiovascular society guidelines and position statements support consuming unsaturated fats from plant oils, nuts, and seeds rather than from animal-derived fats (10-12).

The takeaway: Natural does not necessarily equate to heart-healthy. For cardiovascular prevention, replacing beef tallow with unsaturated plant oils, such as olive, canola, or soybean oil, is the more evidence-based choice. In addition, other foods are a richer source of micronutrients such as vitamin E, choline, and vitamin D.

References

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