

AND NOW A WORD FROM THE DOCTOR...

Your “Fat” Brain

By David Perlmutter, MD, FACN



Have you ever been called a “fathead”? If so, you were probably offended. However, in actuality, close to 70% of your brain is fat. This may surprise many, especially these days when everything associated with the word fat is considered negative.

Our brains are constructed from the very fats we consume in our diets. So right off the bat, this might seem to challenge the wisdom of being on a “low-fat diet.” What contemporary nutritional research is now revealing is that the amount of fat in the diet is less important than the type of fat that a person consumes. Food products containing fats that have been modified to increase product shelf life supply the body with less healthful fats, and build a brain that is ultimately less functional. The key words to look for when reading product labels are “hydrogenated fats” or “hydrogenated oils.” When fats are modified by the process of hydrogenation they become much more stable and thus can remain on grocery store shelves for long periods of time without becoming rancid. Unfortunately, this process is associated with an important downside — it makes the fat or oil much more rigid. When brain cells use these modified fats to repair themselves, the stiffness of these modified fats ultimately creates a brain that is less functional.

So the take-home message is simple: Dietary fat is wonderful and necessary for the brain, provided it hasn’t been modified. Good fats for the brain include unprocessed natural plant oils (like olive oil), as well as fish oils and fat-rich vegetables, such as the avocado.

David