

Low fat diet sees heart disease rates drop

October 9 2014, by Suzi Phillips

New Zealanders have never been healthier in terms of heart disease with death rates plummeting since the 1960s, according to cardiac epidemiologist, Professor Rod Jackson.

The statistics are very clear, says Professor Jackson from the University of Auckland. "The death rate from [heart disease](#) now, is 90 per cent lower than in 1967."

He addressed a public meeting of the Auckland Nutrition Research Network and drew a record audience of more than 200 people to his talk last week.

Professor Jackson says New Zealanders are gaining about six hours of [life expectancy](#) a day from the falling [death rates](#) for [non-communicable diseases](#) like heart disease.

"That's due to many factors, including a drop in smoking, and people getting the message that saturated fats are bad for [heart health](#)," he says.

"Now that there is a lot of publicity about sugar being bad for you and a cause of the rise in obesity, some people are arguing that sugar is the cause of all our health problems, and that fat is now somehow ok. It's not. Saturated fat is as bad for our health as it ever was," he says.

"There seems to be a fashion at the moment, to say that the scientists told us not to eat fat but they were clearly wrong because we're getting fatter, we're getting lots more diabetes and more heart disease."

But they have mixed up their risk factors and diseases, he says. Cutting out saturated fats from our diets has worked extremely well to improve the heart health of New Zealanders. In contrast, diabetes and obesity are increasing but these are quite separate issues just as total fat consumption is quite a separate issue from [saturated fat](#) consumption. Unfortunately many people have put them all together.

"The message should be to replace saturated fats with vegetable fats and oils as well as to eat less free sugar and refined carbohydrates," says Professor Jackson.

Check carefully before buying food advertised as low in fat because it may be high in sugars, he says. But similarly keep away from food that is low in sugar but high in saturated fat.

"New Zealanders should ignore recent publications such as Time magazine saying butter and full-fat milk should be added back into everyday diets. We don't want to reverse the amazing gains we have made in heart health by going back to the high saturated fat diets of 50 years ago" says Professor Jackson. "Our grandparents may have been leaner than we are, but their high animal and dairy fat diets combined with their high smoking rates meant that they had much shorter lives than we can expect to have."

Provided by University of Auckland

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