Heart disease risk can be CUT by replacing 'just ONE per cent of saturated fat intake'

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REPLACING just one per cent of your saturated fat intake with healthy food can reduce the risk of heart disease by up to eight per cent, scientists claim.

Foods such as steak, chocolate, hard cheese, whole milk and butter are high in saturated fats which is bad for our hearts.

Harvard University scientists found around a five per cent higher intake of longer chain dietary SFAs - 12 to 18 carbons - found in these foods was associated with a 25 per cent increased risk of coronary heart disease over the next 24 to 28 years.

Replacing just one per cent of these saturated fats from our diet with more healthy sources of energy drastically reduced the risk by between six and eight per cent.

Saturated fats should be replaced with polyunsaturated fats, monounsaturated fats, whole grain carbohydrates, or plant proteins.

Assistant professor Qi Sun said: "Dietary recommendations should remain on replacing total saturated fat with unsaturated fats or whole grain carbohydrate, as an effective approach towards preventing coronary heart disease."

The study published in The BMJ involved two large US longitudinal cohort studies that involved 73,147 women in the Nurses' Health Study between 1984 and 2012, and 42,635 men in the Health Professionals Follow-up Study between 1986 and 2010.

All were free of maJor long term illnesses at the start and were asked about their diets every four years as well as incidences of coronary heart disease.

The most commonly consumed major saturated fatty acids were lauric acid, myristic acid, palmitic acid and stearic acid, and accounted for around nine to 10 per cent of total energy in the participants.

Each of these saturated fatty acids was associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease.

Researchers then estimated the reduction in risk that would be associated with replacement of saturated fatty acids with more healthy nutrients.

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Prof Sun added: "In two large prospective cohorts of US men and women, dietary intakes of major individual saturated fatty acid - including lauric acid (12:0), myristic acid (14:0), palmitic acid (16:0), and stearic acid (18:0) - were positively associated with risk of coronary heart disease during 24 to 28 years of follow-up.

"Replacement of one per cent daily energy intake from the combined group of 12:0 to 18:0 by equivalent energy from polyunsaturated fat, whole grain carbohydrates, or plant proteins was associated with a 6 to 8 per cent reduced risk of coronary heart disease.

"The same replacement of 16:0 was associated with 10 to 12 per cent reduction in risk."

For the difference of saturated fat intake between high vs low groups, the absolute risk reductions were estimated to be: 106 cases of coronary heart disease per 100,000 person years if replaced by polyunsaturated fat, 71 cases per 100,000 person years if replaced by monounsaturated fat, 83 cases per 100,000 person years for whole grain carbohydrates, and 95 cases per 100 000 person years for plant proteins.

For each one per cent energy substitution, these risk reductions were 23 cases per 100,000 person years for polyunsaturated fat, 15 cases per 100,000 person years for monounsaturated fat, 18 cases per 100,000 person years for whole grain carbohydrates, and 20 cases per 100,000 person years for plant proteins.

Although it was an observational study the results were in line with previous research that has shown the benefits of replacing saturated fatty acids with more healthy nutrients.

Prof Sun concluded: "Higher dietary intakes of major SFAs are associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease.

"Owing to similar associations and high correlations among individual SFAs, dietary recommendations for the prevention of coronary heart disease should continue to focus on replacing total saturated fat with more healthy sources of energy."