

APRIL 2025 | SPRING EDITION | VOLUME 6 | ISSUE 2

# DIETITIAN'S DISH

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER BROUGHT TO YOU BY:  
YOUR MGH WEIGHT CENTER REGISTERED DIETITIANS



**SPRING INTO HEALTHY HABITS**

**WHY READING FOOD LABELS MATTERS**

**REDEFINING OBESITY:  
KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE LANCET COMMISSION**

**UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF SEED OILS ON HEALTH**

**BREAKING DOWN SATURATED VS. UNSATURATED FATS**

The content presented in this newsletter is to provide information on health and nutrition for information purposes only. This newsletter is not an attempt to provide specific medical/nutrition advice. Always consult your health care provider, and follow their advice with regards to your individual care.

# SPRING INTO HEALTHY HABITS:

## PANTRY CLEAN-OUT

Spring is the perfect time for a fresh start—not just for your home but also for your pantry and eating habits! A well-organized kitchen makes it easier to choose healthy, nourishing foods while also helping you save money, reduce food waste, and maintain a balanced diet. By cleaning out the old, bringing in the new, and getting creative with what you already have, you can enjoy nutritious, satisfying meals without extra trips to the store. Follow these steps to refresh your pantry and set yourself up for a healthier season ahead. Happy spring cleaning and happy eating!

### STEP 1: CLEAR OUT THE CLUTTER

Just like decluttering a closet, your pantry needs a reset. Take everything off the shelves and:

- **Check expiration dates** – Toss anything that's expired or stale.
- **Look for hidden sugar & sodium** – Check labels for added sugars, high sodium, and unhealthy fats.
- **Identify hidden gems** – Find long-forgotten staples that can be incorporated into meals.
- **Donate what you won't use** – Unopened, non-perishable items that don't fit your health goals can go to a local food pantry.



## STEP 2: MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR PANTRY STAPLES



**Canned Beans & Lentils** – High in protein and fiber, great for soups, salads, and veggie burgers. (Check page 10's chilli recipe)

**Canned Tomatoes** – Perfect for sauces, stews, and chilis.

**Whole Grains** – Brown rice, quinoa, oats, and whole wheat pasta provide long-lasting energy.

**Canned Fish** – Tuna and salmon, excellent sources of protein and omega-3s.

**Nut Butters & Nuts** – Great for snacking, smoothies, or adding to oatmeal.

**Frozen & Dried Fruits/Veggies** – Extend shelf life and provide essential vitamins.

## STEP 3: CREATE HEALTHY MEALS WITH WHAT YOU HAVE



**Easy Black Bean Tacos** – Mash canned black beans with cumin, garlic powder, and lime juice. Serve in whole wheat tortillas with salsa.

**Mediterranean Chickpea Salad** – Mix canned chickpeas with olive oil, lemon juice, canned olives, and spices for a refreshing dish.

**Quick Tomato & Lentil Soup** – Combine canned tomatoes, lentils, and spices for a hearty, protein-packed meal.

**Salmon & Brown Rice Bowl** – Top cooked brown rice with canned salmon, frozen veggies, and a drizzle of soy sauce.

**Overnight Oats** – Combine oats, nut butter, dried fruit, and milk (or plant-based alternative) for a no-cook breakfast.

# Why Reading Food Labels Matters

Reading food labels helps you make informed, healthier choices. Labels provide key details on serving sizes, calories, and nutrients, aiding portion control and nutrition goals. They also reveal added sugars, sodium, and unhealthy fats linked to chronic conditions. For those with allergies or sensitivities, labels highlight ingredients to avoid. Understanding labels empowers better choices for overall health.

## 101 Nutrition Label Reading Tips:

**Serving Size:** Nutrition info is based on serving size

**Ingredients:** The first few ingredients are the most significant. Choose products where whole foods are listed at the top.

**Added Sugars:** Watch for hidden sugars (e.g., high-fructose corn syrup).

**Sodium:** Opt for low-sodium options when possible.

**Trans Fats:** Avoid trans fats/hydrogenated oil.

**Nutrient Density:** Look for more vitamins, minerals, and fiber per calorie for better health.



## Grocery Guidelines

**Cereals:** high fiber, low sugar

- >5 grams of fiber
- <7g sugar

**Bread:** 1st ingredient is whole grain

- >3 grams of fiber per slice
- Avoid enriched flour

**Granola:** avoid added sugar

- Check the serving size
- <7g total sugar

**Yogurt:** high protein, low sugar

- Choose greek yogurt
- <10g of sugar

**Nuts:** unsalted, plain

- Avoid candied or salty nuts
- 1/4 cup is a serving

**Nut Butter:** unsalted, unsweetened

- 1-2 ingredients, natural
- Avoid added oils or sugars

**Protein Shakes:**

- 20-30g protein
- <10g sugar

**Dairy/Nut milk:** avoid added sugar

- <5g sugar, skim or low fat
- Soy, almond, cashew, oat milk

**Salad Dressings:** limited saturated fat

- Avoid creamy dressings
- <100 calories per serving

**Frozen Meals:**

- <600mg sodium
- >15g protein, <10g fat

**Pasta:** high fiber, high protein

- Choose whole wheat or bean pastas
- >3g fiber

**Protein Bars:** high protein, low sugar

- >8g protein
- <7g sugar

# REDEFINING OBESITY: KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE LANCET COMMISSION



A groundbreaking report from *The Lancet Commission on Clinical Obesity* challenges traditional views on diagnosing and treating obesity. It advocates for a whole-health approach that goes beyond using Body Mass Index (BMI) alone. The report suggests incorporating factors like muscle mass, waist circumference, and co-morbid conditions to better diagnose obesity and treat it as a chronic disease.

## What Does Body Mass Index (BMI) Mean?

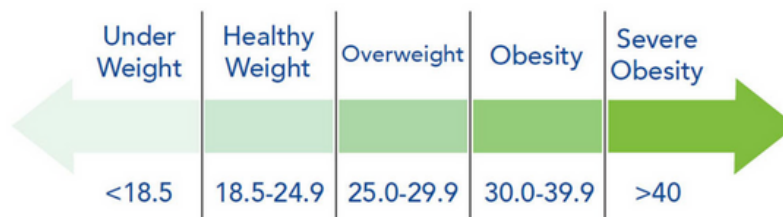
BMI is a numerical value calculated from a person's height and weight. It's currently used as a screening tool to estimate one's BMI category as having underweight, healthy weight, overweight, or obesity.

### Here's how it works:

- Plug your weight and height into this equation:
- This number then helps clinicians classify their patients into one of the following categories:

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{Weight in kilogram}}{(\text{Height in meter})^2}$$

### Weight Categories Based on BMI



### Why Are Experts Moving Away from BMI?

BMI has been used for years to determine a person's weight status, but it has some major flaws. It only considers weight and height, without distinguishing between muscle, bone, and body fat. That means an athlete with strong muscles could have a high BMI and be labeled as having "overweight" or "obesity," despite having good health.

This article emphasizes the need for a better approach to understanding obesity. Rather than relying solely on BMI, clinicians should distinguish between pre-clinical and clinical obesity. This shift focuses more on health risks and body composition rather than just a number on the scale.



## Defining Pre-Clinical and Clinical Obesity

**Preclinical Obesity:** a stage where excess fat is present in the body but hasn't yet led to significant health issues. It's seen as a risk factor for developing obesity-related diseases, but the person may not show symptoms or health problems yet.

**Clinical Obesity:** a stage where obesity has already caused health problems or significant risk for diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and others. It's when excess fat becomes a major factor in harming a person's health and well-being.

## Utilizing Waist Circumference and Muscle Mass

**Waist Circumference:** This measure is used to assess abdominal fat, which is a significant indicator of health risks. A larger waist circumference can signal an increased risk of obesity-related diseases, even before more serious symptoms appear. The article emphasizes that measuring waist circumference could help identify those with pre-clinical obesity, especially since abdominal fat is linked to higher risks of metabolic conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

**Muscle Mass:** Muscle mass can influence metabolism, and individuals with higher muscle mass might have a higher weight but a lower health risk compared to those with more body fat. Evaluating muscle mass can help distinguish between different types of obesity and assess whether excess weight is more related to fat or muscle. This distinction is especially important for diagnosing clinical obesity, where fat accumulation leads to health problems.

**This new approach to obesity encourages a shift in how we diagnose, treat, and think about weight and health. By recognizing obesity as a complex condition that requires more than just a BMI number, we can work toward better, more effective care.**



**Stay informed and advocate for a health-first approach!**

# UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF SEED OILS ON HEALTH

Recently, seed oils have become a popular topic of discussion. People are asking: What are they? Where are they found? Are they harmful? And should we avoid them entirely? Let's take a closer look at seed oils to help you better understand their impact on health.

## WHAT ARE SEED OILS?



Seed oils emerged in the late 1900s as an alternative to hydrogenated oils, which are artificially created fats made by adding hydrogen to liquid oils, making them more solid and stable at room temperature. Seed oils are plant-based oils extracted from the seeds of plants like sunflower, canola, safflower, and soybean. These oils are rich in polyunsaturated fats and omega-6 fatty acids, which are essential for the body but can contribute to health issues when consumed in excess without a proper balance of omega-3s.

## WHERE ARE SEED OILS FOUND?

- **Home Cooking:** Used in frying, baking, or pan-frying, like canola oil in muffins or for frying potatoes.
- **Fried Foods:** Frequently used in fast food chains for deep frying.
- **Processed Foods:** Found in packaged snacks, baked goods, frozen foods, and even chocolate.



## ARE SEED OILS TOXIC OR UNHEALTHY?

Seed oils themselves are not toxic. However, excessive consumption of omega-6 fatty acids, especially when not balanced with omega-3s, can promote inflammation and is linked to chronic conditions like type 2 diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. The real concern arises from the high use of seed oils in ultra-processed and fried foods, which are also high in unhealthy fats and additives.

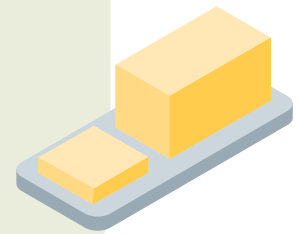
## SHOULD YOU AVOID SEED OILS?

Pan frying your potatoes in some canola oil for Sunday brunch isn't going to impact your health negatively. But, being mindful of the oils that you are choosing to cook with and reading nutrition facts labels when grocery shopping can only positively impact your health. Often reducing seed oil intake is linked to a reduction in processed food intake which can ultimately help improve overall wellness and reduce risk of chronic disease development.

# THE FAT FACTS: BREAKING DOWN SATURATED VS. UNSATURATED FATS

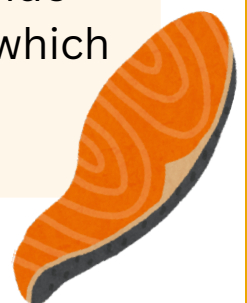
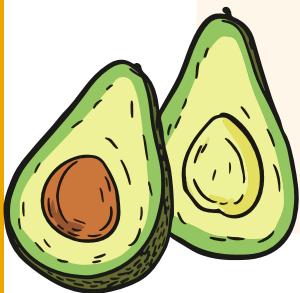
## SATURATED VS. UNSATURATED FATS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

**Saturated fats:** Found in animal products like meat, butter, and dairy, as well as tropical oils like coconut and palm oil. They are typically solid at room temperature. While recent studies have questioned the direct link between saturated fats and heart disease, most health organizations still recommend consuming them in moderation, as they can raise cholesterol levels in some individuals.



**Unsaturated Fats:** Found in plant-based oils, nuts, seeds and fatty fish, these more healthful fats are often liquid at room temperature. There are two types:

- Monounsaturated fats: olive oil, avocados, and nuts. These fats may help reduce bad cholesterol (LDL) and improve heart health.
- Polyunsaturated fats: fatty fish, flaxseeds, and sunflower and safflower oils. These fats provide essential omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, which are crucial for brain and heart health.





# Choosing the Right Fats for Your Health

To improve your overall health, choose unsaturated fats over saturated fats and balance your intake of omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids by consuming a variety of oils, seeds, nuts, and fatty fish.

## For cooking:

When sautéing, roasting and searing **olive and avocado oil** can substitute for vegetable oil



## For baking:

**Mashed avocado and greek yogurt** can substitute butter in baked goods

## For spreading:

Swap **nut butters, mashed avocado or hummus spread** for high fat dairy spreads like cream cheese



## For topping:

**Nuts and seeds** add a nice crunch on top of yogurt and salads. **Olive oil, tahini and hummus** are also great additions to home made salad dressings.



# PANTRY-FRIENDLY VEGGIE CHILI

PREP TIME: 5 min	COOK TIME: 15-20 min	TOTAL TIME: 20-25 min	YIELDS: 4-6 servings
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## Ingredients:

- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 can corn, drained
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp onion powder

## Instructions:

1. In a large pot, combine all ingredients over medium heat
2. Let simmer for 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally
3. Serve warm and enjoy with whole grain crackers or brown rice

# HEART-HEALTHY AVOCADO AND SUNFLOWER SEED SALAD

This fresh and delicious salad is packed with healthy unsaturated fats and fiber - perfect for boosting heart health!

## Ingredients:

1 ripe avocado, diced  
1/4 cup sunflower seeds (unsalted)  
1 cup mixed greens (e.g., spinach, arugula, or kale)  
1 small cucumber, sliced  
1/4 cup cherry tomatoes, halved  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
Salt and pepper to taste



## Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, combine the mixed greens, cucumber, and cherry tomatoes.
2. Add the diced avocado and sunflower seeds to the bowl.
3. Drizzle with olive oil and lemon juice, then season with salt and pepper to taste.
4. Toss everything together and serve!