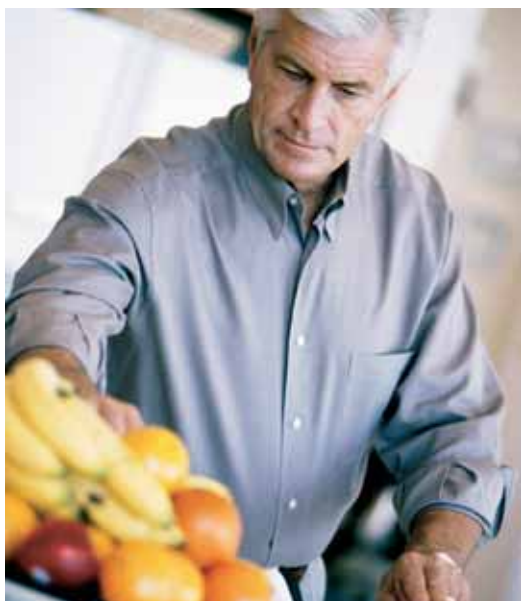


Our Greatest Health Problem: A Major Challenge For A New Corporate Responsiveness In The 21st Century.

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We are a nation of obese people. Estimates place more than 60 percent of us in this category. The incidence of obesity has tripled in the past twenty years, with the bulk of the increase occurring in children and adolescents.

More disturbing however, is this epidemic of obesity has been accompanied by corresponding jumps in the incidence of type II diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease, auto immune diseases, non-alcoholic liver disease (a leading cause of liver failure and transplantation) and cancer.



Indeed, as a practicing gastroenterologist and internist for the past three decades, I have had to deal with these problems on a daily basis and it is becoming increasingly difficult to see an end in sight. As physicians, and as a society, we are being severely constrained in dealing with this alarming problem by a broken health care system that cannot meet our current needs, let alone the forthcoming deluge of patients who are becoming sick as a direct result of the obesity epidemic.

Fortunately, recent research on the effects of certain fats and oils on cellular metabolism may be the key to a solution to this epidemic saving us all from many of these diseases, thus producing huge savings for society.

The fats and oils to which I refer are known as trans-fatty acids and appear on ingredient labels of food packaging as partially-hydrogenated soy oil, fractionated vegetable oil, cottonseed oil and palm kernel oil. These oils have been demonstrated to produce most of the metabolic alterations in the cell. These fats and oils play key roles in the development of insulin resistance, obesity, hypertension, inflammatory and neoplastic disease. They act as if they were very fine grains of sand that are sprinkled into the workings of a fine Swiss watch - eventually the watch will be unable to keep time accurately and fail to work altogether. In the cell, where the workings are infinitely more complex and interrelated, a series of disruptions occur that can go on to produce the

changes necessary to promote the diseases of the epidemic.

Industry has placed these oils in our food to enhance flavor, texture and freshness. They prolong shelf life and allow for more centralized or regionalized manufacturing and distribution of product. These are heuristic practices designed to improve efficiency, throughput and profit - all reasonable goals for any corporate endeavor. Certainly, when partially hydrogenated oils were first introduced into the food manufacturing process, they seemed harmless enough. After all, they were derived from natural sources (soy, cottonseed and palm), so it appeared highly unlikely they could be harmful.

But - powerful research has proven otherwise. Many activist groups and legislators have recognized this and have tried to have these partially hydrogenated trans-fats be more conspicuously labeled on the Nutrition Facts panels that are on every food product. Industry has adamantly opposed this effort, labeling the uproar over these oils and fats as hype, or media-produced hysteria. Indeed it seems that we are seeing a repeat of the scenario identical to that of the effort against the tobacco companies. Unlike the dilemma those companies faced, food companies have access to healthy alternative oils, such as canola and olive oil, which can be substituted in many of these products without sacrificing the salable properties of the dangerous oils.

Wouldn't it be a refreshing change to see industry eliminate these oils and introduce healthier oils? At the very least label them so consumers can make better choices. A major educational program about these dangerous oils could be instituted in our schools supported by industry grants. The PR would be enormous - industry actually being pro-active rather than resistant. The savings to industry's bottom line in its health care costs alone would more than pay for the costs of placing healthier oils in our food; in addition to the

savings achieved by avoiding the legal costs of a prolonged media and legislative battle.

The challenge for a new corporate responsiveness in meeting the greatest health problem of this new century is clear, immediate, and easily met - all that is required is a little initiative.

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Dr. Aron is the author of the highly acclaimed book, Gut-Check: Your Prime Source for Bowel Health and Colon Cancer Prevention, which has been awarded the highest reviewers rating on amazon.com. Other awards and publications include, Outstanding Teacher, Department of Medicine, Mount Zion Hospital; Honorable Mention, Rolex International Award For Excellence, Geneva, Switzerland, 1992; Research and Publication on Nutrition, HIV Disease, Inflammatory Bowel Disease, Ulcer Disease, Liver Disease, Aging; and Premier Physician Award, Crohn's Colitis Foundation of America, 2002

Dr. Aron received his B.A. from UCLA in 1963 and his M.D. at UC Irvine. He completed his internship and residency in internal medicine at Mount Zion Hospital. He was chosen as Chief Medical Resident in 1970 and received a Fellowship Gastroenterology, from Tufts University School of Medicine, Boston and a Fellowship Gastroenterology, Maricopa County Hospital, Phoenix, University of Arizona.