

# Eating saturated fats found to reduce severity of pancreatitis

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A team of researchers from the Mayo Clinic, the Saint Louis University School of Medicine and the Washington University School of Medicine has found evidence that suggests people eating foods with saturated fats may have fewer symptoms if they develop pancreatitis. In their paper published in the journal *Science Advances*, the group describes comparing data on patients with pancreatitis and their diets.

For many years, medical scientists have been grappling with the obesity paradox in which some obese patients appear to fare better when being treated for certain conditions than non-obese patients. In this new effort, the researchers sought to better understand why this may happen at times by focusing on pancreatitis.

Pancreatitis is inflammation of the pancreas. Prior research has shown that it can be triggered by a wide variety of events, such as having abdominal surgery or drinking too much alcohol. Prior research has also shown that obese people are more likely to develop pancreatitis, though it is not known why. In this new effort, the researchers took

a closer look at the link between pancreatitis and consumption of fat—either saturated or unsaturated.

Saturated fats are the kind of fats found in meat, butter, cheese and other foods. Unsaturated fats are found in plants and fish. Prior research has suggested people would be healthier if they reduced [saturated fat](#) consumption and ate more [unsaturated fats](#)—saturated fat has been associated with heart disease and obesity. Researchers have reported exceptions to this rule, however, which has led to the obesity paradox.

To learn more about the link between eating the different kinds of fat and pancreatitis, the researchers studied data from 20 clinical reports across 11 countries where fat consumption had been monitored for obese patients. The researchers found that patients who ate diets heavy in saturated fats who also developed pancreatitis experienced less severe symptoms than patients who ate a [diet](#) with more unsaturated fats.

Intrigued by their findings, the team ran experiments with test mice—they fed some of them a diet heavy in saturated fats and others unsaturated fats—they then induced pancreatitis in all of them. They found that the mice fed the saturated fats developed less [severe symptoms](#). Taking a closer look, they found that saturated fats did not interact very well with [pancreatic](#) triglyceride lipase, which led to less production of long-chain non-esterified [fatty acids](#)—and reduced symptoms of pancreatitis.

**More information:** Biswajit Khatua et al. Adipose saturation reduces lipotoxic systemic inflammation and explains the obesity paradox, *Science Advances* (2021). [DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.abd6449](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abd6449)

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