

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Fried Food Controversy”

The best Southern dishes seem to be fried. But, some scientific studies are cautioning against too much fried food. A 2010 study found too much fried fish may contribute to the high rate of stroke in America's "stroke belt." Experts found, "People living in the stroke belt - including residents of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas and Louisiana - were about 30 percent more likely to eat two or more servings of fried fish every week than those living in the rest of the country." There is evidence that frying fish reduces their amount of omega-3 fatty acids and frying is also associated with an increase in the food's fat and calorie content. A 2012 study, published in *Annals of Neurology*, has shown that older women who eat high amounts of the kind of fat found in fried foods and baked goods face a greater risk of stroke than women who eat lower fat diets. A 2019 study has shown that frequent consumption of fried foods, particularly fried chicken and fried fish/shellfish, was correlated with a higher risk of all cause and cardiovascular mortality in this study population. Total or individual consumption of fried food was not generally linked to cancer mortality. Total fried food consumption of at least one serving per day was associated with a modestly higher but not significant risk of cardiovascular mortality. Additionally, the observed associations of fried chicken consumption and fried fish/shellfish consumption with cardiovascular mortality were consistent with previous studies, which found fried food consumption was associated with a higher risk of heart failure, acute myocardial infarction, total ischemic heart disease, and death. Frying is a complex cooking process that modifies the composition of foods and the frying medium through oxidation, polymerization, and hydrogenation. Moreover, frying makes food crunchy and more appetizing, which can lead to excess intake. Moreover, frying at a high temperature can lead to acrylamide formation in some foods, such as French fries and potato chips. Dietary acrylamide has been associated with higher risk of all cause, cardiovascular, and cancer mortality. Several studies in US populations showed that higher consumption of fried foods was associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. However, a study in a Mediterranean population found no association between fried food consumption and coronary heart disease. Little is known about the relation between fried food consumption and mortality. It is important to understand the associations between fried foods and health outcomes because 25-36% of North American adults consume foods, usually fried, from fast food restaurants every day.

In the America that I love, to me, the delicious benefits outweigh the low risks of eating fried foods. Crunchy is better.

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