

Book Review: The Big Fat Surprise

Yingyi Deng

HNSC 7200X Seminar Nutritional Practice

CUNY Brooklyn College

Book Review: The Big Fat Surprise

The Basic Premise

The Big Fat Surprise challenges prevailing notions about dietary choices, particularly those about high-fat and low-fat diets. In her book, Nina Teicholz takes an investigative approach to uncover crucial misinformation in the scientific field that has demonized saturated fats as a leading cause of health problems for the general population. Decades of research have consistently claimed that reducing saturated fat intake and maintaining a low-fat diet are the most suitable dietary approaches. However, Teicholz (2014) presents a different perspective and argument regarding conventional views on saturated fats. The author questions the role of misinformation in research that has framed saturated fats as the cause of poor health. Her view is that saturated fats are not the problem, and the real issue is the low-fat diet, which promotes unhealthy habits among people, a position informed by recent research that overturned the previous position on saturated fats. The author further highlights the Mediterranean Diet, which, in her view, is not the healthiest option. Thus, Teicholz's position is that a high-fat (including saturated fats), low-carbohydrate diet is the best dietary option for better outcomes. This challenges the conventional view of previous research, which framed saturated fats as the problem.

The Evidence Basis

Nina Teicholz's view is shaped by evidence that both opposes and supports her position. The author highlights how recent research has overturned long-held beliefs about saturated fats, citing the work of researchers like Dr. Robert Atkins, who promoted a high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet. Recent research from the 2020s has produced mixed results regarding the high-fat diet. For instance, a study among 24 young, healthy women on a ketogenic, high-fat, low-carbohydrate

diet revealed that this diet significantly increased LDL cholesterol, which poses significant concerns for cardiovascular health (Burén et al., 2021). However, another most recent study involving 100 volunteers put on a high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet revealed that saturated fats and low carbohydrates did not predict any cardiovascular risk, but the diet's overall impact was an increase in bad and good cholesterol, with high sodium intake contributing to bad outcomes in cardiovascular health (Hagström et al., 2025). These research findings align with Nina Teicholz's position on saturated fats. The bottom line is that, based on research, saturated fats do not, in themselves, adversely affect overall health, but other dietary factors might contribute to undesirable outcomes.

Personal Reaction and Application

Overall, Nina Teicholz's view provides a valid basis for revolutionizing dietary choices to achieve healthier outcomes. Research has established the potential benefits of a high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet and has also challenged the glorification of low-fat diets, which can indirectly contribute to worse health outcomes. Nina Teicholz's arguments are crucial to the revolution in dietary beliefs, overturning unwarranted claims about saturated fats and potentially promoting their health benefits over those of the low-fat diet. Research shows that a high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet was not associated with cardiovascular risk. However, it is essential to understand that other factors within this diet, such as reduced fiber intake and high sodium intake, also present a considerable risk. Despite some downsides, Nina Teicholz's position on a high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet can serve as a healthier option when people adopt healthy habits to achieve better outcomes. In my view, balance is critical in a high-fat diet, including controlling sodium intake to ensure its positive effects. Generally, despite initial widespread objection, saturated fats are not the problem per se, but rather how people incorporate them into their diets.

This shows why Nina Teicholz advocates for saturated fats as the best option for better health and wellness than the low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet.

References

Burén, J., Ericsson, M., Damasceno, N.R., & Sjödin, A. (2021). A ketogenic low-carbohydrate high-fat diet increases LDL cholesterol in healthy, young, normal-weight women: A randomized controlled feeding trial. *Nutrients*, *13*(3), 814.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13030814>

Hagström, H., Hagfors, L.N., Hedelin, R., Brunström, M., & Lindmark, K. (2025). Low carbohydrate high fat-diet in real life; A descriptive analysis of cardiovascular risk factors. *International Journal of Cardiology Cardiovascular Risk and Prevention*, *25*, 200384. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijcrp.2025.200384>.

Teicholz, N. (2014). *The Big fat surprise: Why butter, meat and cheese belong in a healthy diet*. Simon & Schuster.