

## BOOK REVIEW

# Dark Calories: How Vegetable Oils Destroy Our Health and How We Can Get It Back

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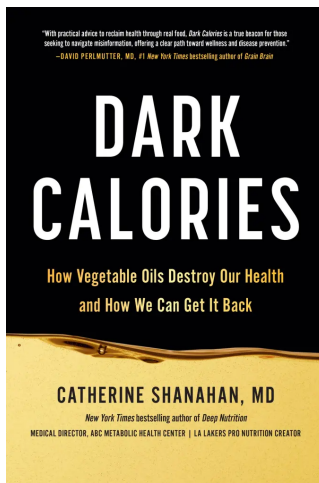
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**Book Title:** Dark Calories: How Vegetable Oils Destroy Our Health and How We Can Get It Back

**Author:** Catherine Shanahan, MD

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Family physician Catherine “Cate” Shanahan, trained in biochemistry at Cornell, has a passion for exposing the harms of processed vegetable oils, also known as seed oils, to the human body. She argues that these highly processed oils found in our modern foods are the greatest threat to human health. They are ubiquitous in processed foods such as salad dressings, sauces, french fries, and any other food products produced with oils.

*Dark Calories* is presented in three parts and 11 chapters. In the first part, “The Science That Medicine Overlooks,” the author covers the science of these inflammatory foods in most people’s pantry and on the menu in restaurants. The second part of the book, “Dark History,” reveals the truth about cholesterol and how Ancel Keys misled the American Heart Association. Shanahan takes to task the food industry that profits from making us sick. The third part, “Taking Back Our Health,” offers a plan for eliminating vegetable oils and healing our bodies.

With solid scientific evidence, she describes the harms of these oils, including uncontrollable hunger, inflammatory fat buildup, disrupted brain energy, intracellular oxidative stress that promotes cancer development, and gut inflammation causing irritable bowel symptoms. She singles out eight “hateful” oils for special mention: canola, corn, cottonseed, soy, safflower, grapeseed, rice bran, and sunflower.

Shanahan promotes healthy unprocessed tree oils, including olive, avocado, and coconut. These natural oils have a balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, while the processed vegetable oils are loaded with more inflammatory omega-6 fatty acids. All vegetable oils are polyunsaturated fatty acids, once thought to be healthier than saturated fat. These processed oils cause cellular damage that, according to Shanahan, underlies most chronic disease.

Shanahan has had a varied career after finishing her family medicine residency at the University of Arizona in Tucson. During the Kobe Bryant era, she ran a nutrition program for the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team. She is the medical director of the PRO Nutrition Program and has forged a partnership with Whole Foods Market. Her website has a wealth of information about healthy and harmful nutrition.<sup>1</sup>

Vegetable oils are not the only major problem with our modern food supply. Among other problems are ultraprocessed foods such high fructose corn syrup and chemicals that are not foods at all. Having read her first book, *Deep Nutrition*,<sup>2</sup> more than 10 years ago and now *Dark Calories*, I think she places too much blame on these oils for the toxic food environment, but the harm is real.

Excessive sugar and refined carbohydrates have led to the majority of Americans having insulin resistance and metabolic dysfunction. Scientist Benjamin Bikman in *Why We Get Sick*<sup>3</sup> analyzes how insulin resistance is the root cause of most chronic diseases. British physician Chris van Tulleken in *Ultra-Processed People*<sup>4</sup> argues that the act of

ultraprocessing foods is the main problem instead of any individual foods such as sugar and vegetables.

If we deviate from the food that nature provides us, we are in a pick-your-poison situation. No wonder that the health span of Americans is suffering as a result. Every family physician and teacher should become versed in this information and be ready to educate our patients.

## REFERENCES

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4. Van Tulleken C. *Ultra-Processed People*. Knopf Canada; 2023.