




Fat Facts You Need to Know




There are several different kinds of fat that are found in foods. Eating too much of some types of fats may increase your blood cholesterol. Eating the right amount of other types of fat can help to keep your cholesterol at the right level. The following are types of fats & the amounts of each that you should have in your diet.

*Unsaturated fats can help keep the HDL good cholesterol level high & may make the bad LDL bad cholesterol less likely to stick to artery walls. Most healthy fats are liquid at room temperature-the best: extra virgin olive oil, canola & peanut oil.

*  Monounsaturated fats are found in olives, peanuts, sunflower seeds, and other nuts. These fats do not raise your cholesterol if you eat them in moderation. Include some foods each day that contain monounsaturated fats. They should make up 10-20% of the total number of calories eaten in one day. Limit nuts to ¼ cup & seeds to 2 tablespoons. Snack on a ¼ c. serving of almonds or spread 1 tablespoon of peanut butter on your toast instead of melted cheese.

*Polyunsaturated fats are found in oils such as canola, sunflower, sesame, safflower & other plant oils. Polyunsaturated fats should make up about 10% of your calorie intake. They are rich in calories, so be cautious about your portion sizes.

*  Omega-3 “essential” fats help protect against heart disease, may protect against irregular heartbeats, help reduce inflammation in the body & have been cleared by the FDA for use to lower the level of blood fat called triglycerides, part of the cholesterol package. They are found in certain types of high fat fish, such as salmon, mackerel, sardines & albacore tuna. (Because of high levels of mercury contaminants, albacore tuna, shark, swordfish, king mackerel should be eaten less often. Pregnant or nursing women should avoid these fish altogether.) Shell fish still contain omega-3’s but in lower levels. Ground flaxseed, walnuts & canola oil are rich in omega-3. Eat at least 2 servings (3-4) oz each) of fatty fish /week. If you can’t eat fish, talk to your caregiver about using a fish oil supplement (pill). Fish oil supplements can give a reliable dose of omega-3’s, usually a total of 1000 mg/day, with or without food. To reduce the risk of a fishy aftertaste, look for formulations that are “enteric coated” & consider taking them at bedtime.

*Saturated fat is found in all animal products, is solid at room temperature, & includes dairy products, butter, lard, coconut or palm oil, shortening & some types of margarine. Hydrogenated & trans-fats are types of fats that are similar to saturated fats. Eating foods that have these types of fats can raise your risk for heart disease by increasing blood cholesterol levels. Saturated fat should make up less than 10% of daily calories. Limit these fats (no more than 15-20 grams/day). These are associated with an increased risk of heart & vascular disease. Reducing

your intake of these can lower your LDL. Commit to using low-fat or skim dairy products, leaner cuts of beef, pork & veal. Trim away fat. Eat skinless poultry & seafood. Animal fats (lard, bacon grease, butter, cheese, & fatty red meat). Coconut & palm oils are highly saturated. Though dairy products are often liquid (cream, 1/2 & 1/2, whole & 2% milk), they're also rich in saturated fat.

***Dietary cholesterol is a type of fat that is found in animal foods including dairy products, meat fish & poultry. Egg yolks & organ meats (such as liver) are also high in cholesterol. Limit these to 200-300mg/day. Dietary cholesterol is found in the actual muscle portion cuts of meat & poultry. Men should shoot for less than 9 oz./day; women less than 6 oz./day. Use egg white or egg substitutes as 1 egg yolk has about 215 mg of cholesterol. High amounts of dietary cholesterol may increase blood cholesterol in some people. Eat less than 300 mg of cholesterol per day.**



Trans fats are man-made fats that are created when liquid oils are partially hydrogenated, as in manufactured shortening. You might not have bought a can of Crisco in years, but if you've eaten a doughnut, fried fast foods such as French fries, crackers, piecrusts, cookies & other processed foods or used stick margarine, you've eaten your share. Trans fatty acids not only raise the artery clogging LDL levels in the blood, they also decrease the protective HDL--a nutritional double whammy!

Recent research indicates that people consuming more Trans fats have a higher risk of heart disease, sudden death from heart attack & possibly diabetes. AVOID Trans fat whenever possible! These negative effects are seen at even low levels (2-7 grams a day). Look for "Trans fat: 0" on the label & no partially hydrogenated oils listed.

Most people need only 1 to 3 servings of fats per day.

1/8 of a medium avocado 🥑

1/8 teaspoon of certain oils, such as canola, olive, peanut, soybean, or safflower.

1/8 teaspoon of low fat or regular soft margarine or mayo. Buy only margarines that have liquid oils as the 1st & 2nd ingredients listed on the food label.

1 Tablespoon regular salad dressing, or two tablespoons of low fat salad dressing.

2 Tablespoons of low fat or fat-free sour cream or cream cheese.

2 Tablespoons of sesame seeds, 6 almonds, 10 peanuts.


2 teaspoons of peanut butter.

Portion Equivalents:

1 Tbsp	Size of thumb	Dollop of mayonnaise
2 Tbsp	Size of golf ball	Small scoop of peanut butter
1 tsp	Size of penny	Serving of olive oil
1 ounce	Size of 4 dice	Serving of cheese
3 ounces	Size of deck of cards	Serving of meat, poultry or fish
1 cup	Size of baseball	1 serving fresh fruit
1/3 cup	Size of a light bulb	1 serving cooked cereal
1/3 cup	Size of egg	1 serving cooked rice

Keep total fat intake at 20% of your daily calories. LIMIT fat to 30-40 grams/day to reduce risk of cancer & other diseases. Do this by eating low fat foods & avoiding high fat foods. If you buy packaged foods, choose those with less than 30% of calories as fat. READ LABELS on packaged foods before buying them.

If you consume 1800 calories/day, multiply 1,800 X .20=360 calories; divide 360 by 9 (number of calories per gram of fat)=40 grams of total fat at the MOST.

Cut fat from all meats before cooking them.  Remove the skin from poultry. Bake, roast, boil, or broil meat, fish, & poultry instead of frying.

AVOID eating fried foods. Eat a baked potato instead of French fries.

Choose low fat or fat-free dairy products. (Fat-Free does not mean “calorie-free”).

Add less fat to foods. Use imitation bacon bits to flavor vegetables, on salads & baked potatoes instead of regular bacon bits.

Steam or microwave  vegetables without adding fat. Sauté with cooking spray, olive oil, or low-sodium broth. 1 or 2 chicken bouillon cubes are great for flavoring vegetables, like squash, collards, and butterbeans instead of bacon or fatback.

Instead of butter, use olive oil  to sauté food & on your bread (add herbs).


Use vegetable cooking sprays (Pam) instead of oil & butter to coat pans.

Use low or nonfat butter-flavored topping instead of regular butter or margarine on popcorn  and other foods.

Marinate for flavor. Try low-sodium teriyaki or soy sauce, ginger, lemon juice, wine, herbs or salsa.

Brown meat & poultry under the broiler or sauté in a little broth, wine, herbs or water instead of frying in oil.

Spoon natural cooking juices instead of gravy or cream sauce over meat & poultry.

Chill soups,  stews, or spaghetti sauce & skim fat off before reheating & serving.

Sources used:

MUSC Health, Heart & Vascular Center 2009 Nutrition Guide

Mayo Clinic Website

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