

The FACTS about FATS

For decades, following a low-fat or no-fat diet was thought to be the best approach to reduce weight and to lower the risk of heart disease. Nutritionists, have known that fat is an essential nutrient in a healthy diet. In fact, none of us can survive without it. However; the types of fats you choose are just as important as the amount of fats you eat. Here is some specific information on the various types of fat and the role they play in your health.

What Exactly Are Fats?

Fats and oils are the most concentrated sources of energy. They are needed for the proper absorption of vitamins A, D, E and K and they are essential for growth and development. Fats also contribute flavor and satiety, a sense of "fullness," when eaten as part of a meal or snack.

There are many different types of fats. So to make it easy for consumers, health experts have classified them into two main categories: "good" fats and "bad" fats.

Type of Fat	"Good Fat"	"Bad Fat"
Monounsaturated Fat	✓	
Polyunsaturated Fat	✓	
Saturated Fat		✓
Trans Fat		✓

Include the "Good" Fats

Fats and oils rich in monounsaturated fat, polyunsaturated fat, and omega-3 polyunsaturated fat provide health benefits.

Monounsaturated fat is the primary fat source found in olive oil. Research shows that monounsaturated fat may have a cholesterol-lowering effect, when substituted for equal amounts of saturated fat, and can help reduce the risk of heart disease. Monounsaturated fat may also help control blood sugar levels.

Polyunsaturated fat is found in plant oils, nuts and fish. Polyunsaturated fat also helps to maintain heart health and lower blood cholesterol levels.

Omega-3 polyunsaturated fat from fatty fishes, such as salmon, or from vegetable oils can help promote mental acuity and brain development.

Limit the "Bad" Fats

Saturated and trans fats are the "bad" fats. Consumption of these fats has been linked to poor health. Olive oil contains zero trans fats and is lower in saturated fat than many other commonly used fats, such as shortening and butter.

Saturated fats are solid or nearly solid at room temperature. All animal fats (meat, poultry and dairy) contain saturated fat. These fats can raise blood cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease.

Trans fats are also naturally present in meat and dairy products, though in small amounts. Most trans fats are created through a manufacturing process called hydrogenation that turns liquid oil into solid fat. Trans fats remain solid at room temperature like saturated fats. Trans fats may raise LDL (bad) cholesterol levels while decreasing HDL (good) cholesterol levels. It's best to avoid trans fats.

Dietary Guidelines Provide Specific Recommendations

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are updated every 5 years by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services. In the table below, you'll find specific recommendations on dietary habits that help decrease risk of various diseases and that promote health.

From the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans



- Keep total fat intake between 20 to 35 percent of calories for adults, between 25-35 percent of calories for children and adolescents, and between 30 to 35 percent of calories for children 2 to 3 years of age, with most fats coming from sources of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, such as fish, nuts and vegetable oils.
- Consume less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fats and less than 300 mg/day of cholesterol, and keep trans fat consumption as low as possible.
- When selecting and preparing meat, poultry, dry beans, and milk or milk products, make choices that are lean, low-fat or fat-free.
- Limit intake of fats and oils high in saturated and/or trans fats, and choose products low in such fats and oils*

* Olive oil contains zero trans fats and is lower in saturated fat than other commonly used fats such as shortening and butter.

Striking a Balance

Two out of three Americans are overweight, so it's important to balance your energy intake from all foods with enough physical activity to maintain a healthy weight. Select a wide variety of foods low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol to help reduce your risk of heart disease.

SOURCES:

2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans: <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines/>

United States Food and Drug Administration: www.usda.gov

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