

Fat in the Diet

What is fat?

Fat is a source of calories and energy for your body. You need to have some fat in your diet for good health because:

- Fat is used by your body to make hormones that affect blood pressure and heart health.
- Fat helps the body absorb some nutrients, such as vitamins A, D, E, and K. Certain antioxidants are also absorbed much better if fat is present. Antioxidants help keep the body's cells healthy.
- Some fats found in plant oils and fish may help prevent high cholesterol, heart disease, and other health problems.

Fats and oils also help food taste good. Most fats are found in meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, plant oils, packaged foods, and snack foods.

All fats, even healthy fats, are very high in calories. Eating more calories than your body can use causes weight gain. Weight gain increases your risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

Saturated and trans fats are the more harmful fats.

- Saturated fats are mainly in animal products such as whole and low-fat dairy products, poultry, lard, and meats. Prime rib and dark-meat poultry with the skin have more saturated fat than lean cuts such as pork tenderloin, chicken breast without skin, or fish. Saturated fat is also found in some plant foods, such as palm oil, coconut oil, and cocoa butter. Try to eat as little saturated fat as possible.
- Trans fats can be found naturally in some animal products, but most of the trans fats in our diet are made with a process called hydrogenation. It is done to keep fat from going bad and turns the fat from a liquid to a solid. Trans fats are found in margarine, shortening, packaged foods, ice cream, many baked or fried foods, and fast food. Trans fats may be even more dangerous for the heart than saturated fat and may increase the risk of some cancers.

Food manufacturers must list the amount of trans fat and saturated fat on the Nutrition Facts label of packaged foods.

Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats and oils are healthier fats.

- Polyunsaturated fats are found mostly in safflower, corn, soybean, sunflower, and cottonseed oils, and in fish oil.
- Monounsaturated fats are found mainly in canola, olive, and peanut oils, as well as in most nuts.

Fatty acids are the building blocks that make up poly- and monounsaturated fats. Three important fatty acids are called omega-3, omega-6, and omega-9.

- Omega-3 fatty acids are found in fish and some plants. They are good for heart health. They may reduce the risk of stroke, high blood pressure, and inflammation. Good sources are oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, and tuna.

Omega 3 fatty acids are also in fish oil supplements. Good plant sources for omega-3 fatty acids are canola oil, soybeans, flaxseed, avocado, and some types of nuts, such as walnuts and almonds. Check with your healthcare provider before taking supplements.

- Omega-6 fatty acid is found in corn, safflower, soybean, and sunflower oils.
- Omega-9 fatty acid is found in olive oil, canola oil, and avocados.

It is best to balance fatty acids to help prevent health problems. Many Americans eat 10 times as much omega-6 fatty acid as omega-3 fatty acid.

How much fat do I need in my diet?

Eating some fat—especially the good fats—is healthy, but many Americans eat too much and are overweight. The American Heart Association says that you should:

- Get no more than 20 to 35% of your total calories from fat.
- Get no more than 7 to 10% of your calories from saturated fat. For example, if you eat 2000 calories a day, you should eat no more than 15 to 20 grams (g) of saturated fat.
- Don't eat trans fats at all or limit them to less than 1% of your calories.
- Eat less than 300 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol a day. If you have heart disease, you should eat less than 200 mg a day. Cholesterol and triglycerides are the fatty materials in your blood. Your body uses cholesterol to make hormones and to build and maintain cells. Triglycerides are used by the body for energy. However, when your body has too much cholesterol, fatty deposits called plaque may build up in blood vessels and make them narrower. The narrowing decreases the amount of blood flow through the vessel. Small pieces of plaque may break off from the wall of a blood vessel and completely block a smaller blood vessel, which can cause a heart attack or stroke.

How can I cut down on the fat in my diet?

You can cut down on the fat in your diet by eating fewer high-fat animal products, such as red meat, poultry with skin, whole-milk dairy products, and fried foods. Even healthy fats, such as oils, nuts, seeds, and avocado, are high in calories and should be eaten in limited amounts. Eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Try to follow these suggestions:

- Read food labels.
- Choose sour cream, cream cheese, cheese, yogurt, and milk products that are nonfat or low-fat.
- Cook with canola or olive oil instead of butter and margarine. Choose fats and oils that contain less than 2 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon.
- Buy only lean cuts of meat, such as chicken or turkey breast without skin; pork tenderloin; flank, round or sirloin beef; and low-sodium ham.
- Cook lean. Bake, broil, grill, steam, or microwave foods instead of frying them.
- Have a meatless dinner a few times a week. Try meals with beans instead of meat.

- Use low-fat or fat-free salad dressings. Try a flavored vinegar on your salad. It has no fat and can have lots of flavor.
- Try to have cookies and desserts only as a special treat, not every day. When you fix desserts at home, use healthy oils, egg whites, and fruit for sweetening.
- Steam vegetables with herbs in the microwave, or heat them in a small amount of healthy oil or cooking spray, instead of cooking them with butter.
- Avoid trans fats by choosing fewer packaged convenience foods and checking labels for saturated fat and trans fat content.
- Eat broiled or grilled fish, such as salmon or tuna, at least 2 times a week.
- Fast food can be very high in total fat, saturated fat, and trans fat. If you eat fast food, choose grilled chicken or a salad with fat-free or low-fat dressing. Ask for nutrition information from fast-food restaurants so that you can choose wisely.
- For a healthy snack, choose fresh fruits or low-fat yogurt instead of high-fat fried snacks or sweets.

Not all fat is bad, but it can be unhealthy if you eat too much. Eating a diet low in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol and getting regular exercise will help lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. It will also help you keep a healthy weight or lose weight if you are overweight.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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Cholesterol and Saturated Fat Content of Selected Foods



Dairy Products

	Saturated Fat	Cholesterol
8 ounces whole milk	5 g	25 mg
8 ounces skim milk	0 g	5 mg
4 tablespoons sour cream	7 g	30 mg
4 tablespoons fat-free sour cream	0 g	6 mg
8 ounces yogurt	5 g	30 mg
8 ounces nonfat yogurt	0 g	5 mg
1 ounce cheddar cheese	6 g	30 mg
1 ounce low fat cheddar cheese	1 g	6 mg
8 ounces cottage cheese	4 g	36 mg
8 ounces low fat cottage cheese	1 g	9 mg



Fats

	Saturated Fat	Cholesterol
1 tablespoon butter	7 g	30 mg
1 tablespoon margarine	2 g	0 mg
1 tablespoon corn, canola, or safflower oil	1 g	0 mg



Meat and Proteins

	Saturated Fat	Cholesterol
1 whole egg	2 g	211 mg
3 ounces pork chop	4 g	68 mg
3 ounces pork sausage	7.5 g	70 mg
3 ounces sirloin steak	3 g	76 mg
3 ounces beef ribs	5 g	69 mg
3 ounces chicken breast without skin	1 g	73 mg
3 ounces 90 - 94% lean ground beef	4 g	78 mg
3 ounces ham	1 g	14 mg
3 ounces chicken thigh with skin	3.7 g	79 mg
3 ounces shrimp	0.25 g	200 mg
3 ounces crab	0.15 to 0.2 g	45 to 85 mg
3 ounces tuna	0 g	26 mg
3 ounces salmon	1.5 g	50 mg
4 ounces pinto beans	0 g	0 mg

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