

Choosing Healthy Fats

Fats provide long-lasting fuel for the body and make food taste good. Some fats—omega-3 and omega-6 fats (or “essential fatty acids”)—play vital roles in our body functions. However, fats contain a lot of calories. So it’s important to limit the amount of fats we consume and make sure these are high quality fats.

The 2015 US Dietary Guidelines limit:¹

- Saturated fats to less than 10% of total calories/day
- Total fats to 27 grams/day = 5 tsp/day of oil

What fats should you eat?

Unsaturated fats are “good” fats. There are two types: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.

Polyunsaturated fats: These include essential fats: omega-3 and omega-6 fats. They are only found in food; our bodies don’t make them.

- **Omega-6 fats** are in many common foods such as corn and soy, and canola and grapeseed oil.
- **Omega-3 fats** are found in fatty fish, and in hemp, flaxseed, and walnuts. They have many benefits, including reducing inflammation. Fatty fish, in particular, has been found to reduce the risk of heart disease. It’s better to eat fish, instead of fish oils, as studies show that fish oils alone don’t have this benefit.⁴ The American Heart Association recommends eating at least 2 servings/week of fatty fish.⁵



1 serving = 3.5 ounces = about the size of a deck of cards

Monounsaturated fats: Foods high in monounsaturated fat include olive oil, avocados, nuts, and seeds. Good sources include almonds, cashews, pecans, peanuts, and sunflower and sesame seeds. Extra virgin olive oil has many health benefits, as it is high in antioxidants and acts to reduce inflammation.^{2,3}



To remember which fish contain high amounts of omega-3 fats, think **S.M.A.S.H.**

See seafood.edf.org for other fish.

Salmon (wild)
Mackerel (Atlantic and Alaskan) NOT Spanish or King, which are high in mercury
Anchovies
Sardines
Herring

TIPS ABOUT OILS

When cooking with oils, don’t let them smoke, as this destroys their health benefits. Store all oils away from heat and light

What fats should you avoid?

Avoid **trans fats**, as these increase heart disease risk even when eaten in small amounts. Fortunately, trans fats have been eliminated from many foods. Foods containing trans fats from partially hydrogenated oils are primarily in processed foods like stick margarine, shortening, chips, crackers, and cookies.

BUYER BEWARE Food companies don’t have to label trans fats in their products if the amount of trans fat is less than 0.5 grams/serving. Don’t have multiple servings of these foods because you may be eating an unhealthy amount of trans fat.⁸

Saturated fats are not as bad as trans fats, but can negatively impact health when eaten in excess. These fats have been associated with higher cholesterol levels and with cardiovascular disease.^{6,7} According to current US dietary guidelines, no more than 10% of your total calories should come from saturated fats. Foods containing large amounts of saturated fat include:

- lard
- whole milk
- ice cream
- cheese
- butter
- red meat


References:


¹ Health.gov. Dietary Guidelines, 2015.
² Molecular Nutr & Food Research.51(10):1215-24. 2007
³ Nature 2005; 437:45-6.
⁴ Arch Intern Med. 2012;172(9):686-694.


⁵ Heart.org. Healthy Living, accessed 2016.
⁶ N Engl J Med 1997;337:1491-1499.
⁷ J Am Coll Nutr 2001;20(1):5-19.
⁸ fda.gov. Labeling Nutrition, accessed 2016.

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ACTION PLAN

 Which of the tips will you try? Circle them.

 When will you start? _____

 How confident are you that you will accomplish your goal (from 0-100%)?

 Follow-up plan

