

Know Your Fats

Fat is an important nutrient for our bodies. Fat can provide energy, assists with transport of some vitamins, and can help fill or satisfy us from a meal. Fat is high in calories, so a moderate intake of all types of fat is best. Keep total fat intake between 25 and 35 percent of calories, with most fats coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids such as fish, nuts and vegetable oils.

Saturated Fat

Saturated fats are solid at room temperature. Saturated fat is an artery-clogging, sticky fat that increases cholesterol and should be avoided. They are mainly found in animal products including eggs, red meat, butter and whole or 2% milk dairy products. Some oils (coconut and palm oil) or foods made with these oils have a higher percentage of saturated fat and can be replaced with canola or olive oil for less saturated fat.

Unsaturated Fats – Monounsaturated and Polyunsaturated

Unsaturated Fats are liquid at room temperature. These fats are a healthier choice when used in moderation because they do not raise blood cholesterol.

Monounsaturated fats can actually help to increase the good-HDL cholesterol.

Monounsaturated Fats – Good sources include olive or canola oil, nuts and seeds, avocados and fish.

Polyunsaturated Fats – Good sources include corn, soybean and safflower oil, flax seed and walnuts.

Trans-fatty Acids and Hydrogenated Fat

Trans-fatty acids (TFA) are unhealthy fats found in small amounts in various animal products such as beef, pork, lamb and the butterfat in butter and milk. Trans-fatty acids are also formed during the process of hydrogenation or changing a liquid fat to a shelf-stable solid fat. Partially hydrogenated oils are found in many products and can contribute to increasing cholesterol levels and the risk of developing heart disease.

Comparison of Dietary Fats

Adapted from AHA, Nutrition and Diet, *Know Your Fats*.

