

Fat... Is it all that?

Overview

Fat is usually seen as a culprit in the eyes of many. In fact, some often blame it for lodging onto certain parts of their body. However, it is important that we educate ourselves on this nutrient to learn how to make better food choices and avoid putting our health at risk. So, is it all that bad? This sheet will provide you with basic information on fat and its functions, and some further details that will guide you when shopping for foods for meal preparation.

What is Fat?

Fat is one of the three main macronutrients necessary for growth and development. The other two macronutrients are Carbohydrates and Proteins. Macronutrients are nutrients required in large amounts by the body and they provide energy in the form of calories.



Why do we need Fat?

Fats play an important role in our diet, they:

- Are the most concentrated source of energy. Each gram of fat provides our bodies with 9 calories of energy. Carbohydrates and Proteins each provide approximately 4 calories per gram.
- Enhance the flavour of foods making them tastier.
- Help to regulate our mood, regulate reproductive and steroid hormones, and plays a role in brain health.^{1,2,3}
- Help to provide a form of protection for our organs and keeps us warm.

Types of Fat

The main types of fats are trans fats, saturated fats, monounsaturated & polyunsaturated fats.

Trans Fats

- Trans fats tops the list of *bad fats*. These types of fats are found in many processed foods containing *partially hydrogenated oils*. and can raise LDL or bad cholesterol levels and lower HDL or good cholesterol. They also increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Although some trans fats can be found naturally in some meat and dairy products, like cheese & beef⁴, the main sources in our diets are from baked goods (e.g. doughnuts, cakes, cookies, biscuits, pizza, pie crusts), and also stick margarines and vegetable shortening.



Saturated Fats

- These are another type of “*bad fat*” which can raise the levels of “bad cholesterol” in the blood and can also lead to heart disease and weight gain.^{5,6,7}
- Saturated fats are found naturally in many foods, mainly animal products such as meats and especially fatty beef, pork, mutton and poultry with skin, bacon, sausage and other processed meats. Cheese, butter and whole milk products are also high.
- Other foods with high saturated fat include some plant-based oils like palm oil and coconut oil, as well as convenience, processed and fast foods like pizza, baked goods and fried foods.



Monounsaturated Fats (MUFA)

- Monounsaturated fats are healthier fats found in foods such as canola, sesame and peanut oils, almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, olives, macadamia nuts and pistachio.
- According to the American Heart Association, these healthy fats help to reduce bad cholesterol levels and raise good cholesterol levels. They also provide Vitamin E and makes you feel full, which can help to reduce your calorie intake.⁸



Polyunsaturated Fats (PUFA)

- Polyunsaturated fats are also healthy fats, with similar health benefits as monounsaturated fats. They also provide us with Omega-3 and Omega-6.
- Sources include soybean, corn and sunflower oil, salmon, sardine, fresh mackerel, walnuts, peanuts, cashews, chia seeds and flaxseeds.



How Much Fat Should I Eat Daily?

The current recommendation for fats is 20-35% of your total calories, with most coming from Monounsaturated and Polyunsaturated fats.^{9,10} Choose lean meats, liquid fats and less baked products to limit your intake of saturated and *trans* fats. Replace meats with legumes and beans.

For example: For a 2000 calorie diet, then calories from fats would be approximately 400 calories at 20% and approximately 700 calories at 35%.

Practice to read food labels to identify the amounts of fats within food items. A few tips to bear in mind are:

If the label % Daily Values (DV) are based on a 2000 calorie diet:

- Look for 15% to 20% monounsaturated fats.
- Polyunsaturated fats: 5% to 10%
- Saturated fats should be less than 10% or 13g (ideally less than 7%).
- Cholesterol should be less than 300mg per day.
- NO trans fats.



Other Heart Healthy tips on fat include:

- Balancing your energy intake and doing at least 30 minutes of physical activity daily to achieve or maintain a healthy body weight.
- Consume 2 servings of fruits and 3 or more servings of vegetables daily.
- Choose whole-grain & fibre-rich foods e.g. sweet potatoes, carrots, oranges, peanuts, whole grain breads and cereals.
- Choose lean meats removing any skin or fish and select fat-free and/or low-fat dairy products. (e.g. low fat or 2% fat milk)
- Limit alcohol consumption and foods and beverages with added sugars.
- Try to use liquid oils that are lower in saturated fat e.g. olive oil, corn oil and soya bean oil.

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