

Dietary Fats and Your Health

Why is fat important?

Everyone needs to eat some fat to stay healthy. Dietary fats give you energy and help you absorb vitamins from foods, such as vitamins A, D, E, and K.

How much fat is enough?

The amount of fat you should have every day depends on your age, gender, and activity level. Generally, men should aim for about 65 grams of fat, while women should aim for about 50 grams. This usually means choosing foods that are low in fat, and adding a small amount (2 to 3 tablespoons or 30 to 45 grams) of unsaturated fats to foods each day, such as non-hydrogenated margarine, oil or salad dressing.

What if I eat too much fat?

Eating some fat is good for your health. However, eating high fat foods too often can result in weight gain because fats are very high in calories. Being overweight can increase your risk of developing diabetes. Eating too much fat can also lead to other health concerns, such as cancer and heart disease.

Healthy Fat Choices

Fats are not all the same. Some fats are good for your health, while others are not. Some high fat foods, like chips or cookies, give you very little nutrition with the fat. Nuts, seeds, avocado, salmon, sardines, and cheese are also high fat foods, but they provide important nutrients as well.

Good choices are *monounsaturated* fats, which help to lower cholesterol levels. These fats are found in olive, canola and soybean oils and in foods with these ingredients, as well as in avocado and nuts.

Polyunsaturated fats also help to lower cholesterol levels. Two special polyunsaturated fats – omega 3

and omega 6 – are very important for your health. Omega 3 fats are found in fish, flax seeds, walnuts and canola oil. Good sources of omega 6 fats are seeds, safflower, sunflower, corn, and soybean oils, and foods that contain these ingredients.

Unhealthy Fat Choices

Saturated and *trans* fats are poor choices mainly because they can increase blood cholesterol levels. It is very important to eat less saturated and trans fats. Saturated fats are mostly found in animal products, especially fatty meats like sausages and bacon, and in high fat dairy products like butter, whipping cream, sour cream, cream cheese and chip dips.

Trans fats come mostly from vegetable oils that have been made solid through partial hydrogenation. Examples include hard margarine, shortening, donuts, Danish pastries, cookies, crackers, chips, and many fast foods.

Healthy Eating

Tips for meals at home:

- Use less butter, but add a small amount of oil and non-hydrogenated margarine each day. Try making your own salad dressings with oil and ingredients like balsamic vinegar, garlic, and herbs.
- Use condiments like mustard, ketchup, relish, and cranberry sauce to add flavour to foods.
- Use cooking methods that do not use fat, like baking, broiling or microwaving.
- Experiment with lower fat desserts – a piece of pie or cheesecake can have up to 20 grams of fat. Substitute with homemade fruit crisp (5 grams/half cup) or sherbet (2 grams/half cup).
- Buy skim or 1% milk – 1 cup of whole milk contains 8 grams of fat while 1 cup of 1% milk has only 3 grams. If you are used to whole milk, change slowly by switching to 2% milk first.

Tips for snacks:

- Try a low fat yogurt (3 grams fat) or a low fat homemade banana muffin (5 grams fat).
- Read labels and choose crackers that have less than 3 grams of fat per serving.
- Snacks that have almost no fat include fresh fruit, air popped popcorn, and pretzels.

Tips for eating out:

- Choose foods that are grilled, roasted, poached, or barbequed, rather than deep-fried.
- Ask for menu substitutions. For example, a baked potato with a teaspoon of

non-hydrogenated margarine has 5 grams of fat, while a large order of fries can have over 20 grams of fat.

- Try sharing dessert with a friend and cut the fat in half.

Information on Food Labels

The Nutrition Facts Table (see below) shows how much and what kind of fat is in pre-packaged foods. You can use this information to help you choose healthier prepackaged foods.

Nutrition Facts Table

Nutrition Facts		%DV
Serving Size 10 crackers (g)		
Calories 110		
Fat 6g		9%
Saturated fats 1.5 g		13%
+ Trans 2.0 g		
Cholesterol 0 mg		0%
Sodium 190 mg		8%
Carbohydrate 11 g		4%
Fibre 0 g		
Sugars 3 g		
Protein 3 g		
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 3%	
Calcium 0%	Iron 4%	

Serving Size – Always check the serving size and compare to the amount you are eating.

Fat – Foods labeled low fat have less than 3 grams of fat per serving.

Fat free – means that the food must have less than 0.5 grams of fat per serving.

% DV (Daily Value) for fat shows the amount of fat in food compared to the average amount recommended each day. The DV for fat is 65 grams.

Saturated and trans fats – Keep these as low as possible so your daily intake is less than 20 grams of saturated and trans fats combined.

For more information on the amount of fat and other nutrients in foods see The Canadian Nutrient File at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/fiche-nutri-data/index_e.html.

For nutrition information, call Dial-A-Dietitian and speak to a registered dietitian at 604-732-9191 in Greater Vancouver or 1-800-667-3438 toll-free in BC.



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