

Good Fats, Bad Fats

All fats are not alike. Some types of fats are essential for good health. Other fats can raise blood cholesterol levels or have other negative effects on cardiovascular health. Eating too much fat of all types can add excess calories and lead to weight gain. This handout will help you sort out the "good" (heart healthy) fats from the "bad" (unhealthy) fats.*

HEART HEALTHY ("GOOD") FATS

The fats in this category are *unsaturated* fats (the term *unsaturated* refers to the chemical structure of these fats). Unsaturated fats are found in plant foods or in fish that eat microscopic plants. One type of polyunsaturated fat -- omega-3 fatty acids -- has been found to have many positive effects. For example, omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of sudden cardiac death, help keep blood vessels flexible and reduce excess blood clotting. Other polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats will lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol when used in place of saturated fat. Foods rich in these "good" unsaturated fats are listed below:

♥ **Omega-3 Fatty Acids** (a type of Polyunsaturated Fat)

- Fatty fish such as salmon, herring, sardines and trout



The American Heart Association recommends eating at least two 3 oz. servings of fatty fish per week.

- Flaxseed, walnuts and canola oil (all contain a less active form of omega-3)

♥ **Other Polyunsaturated Fats** (called Omega-6 Fatty Acids)

- Vegetable oils: corn oil, safflower oil, sesame oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil
- Soft (liquid or tub) margarine, ideally one that is *trans* fat-free
- Walnuts
- Sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds
- Soy "nuts" (roasted soy beans), soy nut butter and tofu

♥ **Monounsaturated Fats**

- Vegetable oils: olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil
- Nuts: almonds, cashews, peanuts, pecans, pistachios
- Avocado
- Peanut butter and almond butter



* *All foods and oils contain a mixture of fats (fatty acids, to be more precise). Foods are categorized here by the predominant type of fat or are included in a category if the fat is present in significant quantities.*

UNHEALTHY ("BAD") FATS

Fats with negative health effects are *saturated* fats and *trans* fats. Saturated fats are found primarily in high-fat meats and dairy foods. Trans fatty acids (called "trans fats" for short) are present in foods that contain "partially hydrogenated" vegetable oils: fried foods, stick margarine, crackers, microwave popcorn, baked goods and other processed foods. Studies have shown that both saturated fats and trans fats can raise LDL (the "bad") cholesterol. Saturated and trans fats may also make the lining of blood vessels (the endothelium) less flexible. In addition, trans fats may depress the "good" blood cholesterol (HDL cholesterol) when eaten in large quantities. The foods listed below contain these unhealthy fats and should be avoided or eaten sparingly.

❖ **Saturated Fats**

- Fatty cuts of beef, pork and lamb
- Poultry skin, chicken wings, dark meat chicken
- High fat dairy products: cheese, butter, whole milk, 2% reduced fat milk, cream, cream cheese, sour cream, ice cream
- Tropical oils: coconut oil, palm oil, palm kernel oil, cocoa butter
- Lard



❖ **Trans fatty acids (or "trans fats")**

- Stick margarine and some tub margarines
- Vegetable shortening (e.g. original Crisco)
- Fried foods: doughnuts, French fries, other deep fried fast food items
- Commercially prepared foods containing partially hydrogenated oils: crackers, cookies, cakes, pastries, microwave popcorn and other snack foods



WHAT ABOUT DIETARY CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol is not a fat. It is a waxy substance found only in foods of animal origin: meat, poultry, seafood, egg yolks and dairy products. Humans do not need to consume any cholesterol because our cells can produce all the cholesterol our bodies need for use in cell membranes and hormones. High intakes of dietary cholesterol can raise LDL cholesterol and can increase heart disease risk in other ways. However, this effect is generally not as strong as that of saturated fats and trans fats. People who have high blood cholesterol levels, heart disease or diabetes should limit their intake of dietary cholesterol. The foods listed below are relatively high in dietary cholesterol:

❖ **Dietary Cholesterol**

- Egg yolks or whole eggs: limit to 2 per week
- Organ meats: liver, brains, kidney and sweetbreads
- Shrimp and squid/calamari (one serving a week is okay)
- Meat, poultry and seafood in large amounts (i.e. more than 5 or 6 oz./day)