



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 that is healthy for you depends on your age, gender, and activity level. For most healthy women, the range is between 41 and 72 grams of fat each day. For most healthy men, the range is between 54 and 94 grams of fat each day. To stay in this range, Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide recommends choosing lower fat milk and alternatives and lean meats, and using 30 to 45 mL (2 to 3 tablespoons) of unsaturated fat such as liquid vegetable oils and non-hydrogenated margarines when preparing food each day. Limit high fat foods such as pastries, doughnuts, ice cream, and salty snacks.

What if I eat too much fat?

Eating some fat is good for your health. However, eating high fat foods too often can cause weight gain because fats are very high in calories. Being overweight can increase your risk of developing diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

Healthy Fats

Unsaturated fats, such as mono- and poly-unsaturated fats, are healthy fats. Choosing foods with unsaturated fats helps to lower your blood cholesterol and keep your heart healthy.

Monounsaturated fats are found in nuts, avocados, and canola and olive oils. Polyunsaturated fats, including essential omega 3 and 6 fats, are found in oily fish such as salmon, sardines, and herring, seeds, and most vegetable oils such as soybean, sunflower and safflower oils.

Unhealthy Fats

Saturated and trans fats are unhealthy fats because they can increase your blood cholesterol level. Limiting the amount of trans and saturated fats you eat is the most important dietary change you can make for improving heart health.

Saturated fats are mostly found in fatty meats such as sausages and bacon, full fat dairy products like butter and cheese, fast foods, and processed foods.

Most of the trans fat we eat comes from food such as baked goods and fried foods containing partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, such as shortening and hard margarine.

Healthy Eating

Here are some tips for healthy eating at home:

- Use cooking methods that do not use fat or use a small amount of liquid vegetable oil, such as baking, broiling, steaming, poaching, microwaving, grilling or stir-frying.
- For baking, use soft non-hydrogenated margarine or liquid vegetable oil instead of butter, hard margarine, shortening or lard.
- Use garlic, lemon, vinegars, herbs and spices, fruit sauces and fresh salsa to flavour foods.
- Serve lower fat desserts – a piece of pie or cheesecake can have up to 20 grams of fat. Substitute with homemade fruit crisp (5 grams/125 mL or half cup) or sherbet (2 grams/125 mL or half cup).
- Buy skim or 1% milk – 250 mL (1 cup) of whole milk contains 8 grams of fat while the same amount of 1% milk has only 2.5 grams and skim milk has no fat.

Here are some tips for healthy eating and buying food:

- Shop for vegetables and fruits, whole grain products, lower fat milk alternatives, lean meat and alternatives with little or no added fat, soft

margarines, and vegetable oils such as canola, olive and soy bean.

- When buying pre-packaged foods, use the information on the Nutrition Facts table to choose foods with the lowest amounts of saturated and trans fats. As a general rule, choose foods with less than 10% Daily Value (DV) for saturated and trans fat.

Here are some tips for healthy eating at restaurants:

- Ask your server for nutrition information on menu items. Choose foods that are grilled, roasted, poached, or barbecued, rather than deep-fried or sautéed.

- Ask for menu substitutions. For example, a baked potato with 5 mL (a teaspoon) of non-hydrogenated margarine has 5 grams of fat, while a large order of fries can have over 20 grams of fat.
- Share a 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 foods.

Nutrition Facts table

Serving Size – The amount of fat is based on the serving size shown. Always check the serving size and the amount you are eating.

Amount of Fat – The number of grams of total fat, saturated fat, and trans fat are listed for the serving size shown.

Nutrition Facts	
<i>Per 1 cup (55 g)</i>	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 220	
Fat 2g	3%
Saturated 0 g	0%
+ Trans 0 g	
Cholesterol 0 mg	0%
Sodium 270 mg	11%
Carbohydrate 44 g	15%
Fibre 8 g	32%
Sugars 16 g	
Protein 6 g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 4%	Iron 40%

% Daily Value (DV) – The % Daily Value tells you the amount of nutrients in a food. Foods with 5% DV or less for total fat are considered low in fat.

% Daily Value for Saturated and Trans Fats – Choose foods with a %DV of 10% or less for saturated and trans fat.

For more information, see The Canadian Nutrient File at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/fiche-nutri-data/index_e.html.

For nutrition information, call 8-1-1 to speak with a registered dietitian.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call 8-1-1 for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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