



Dietary Fat and Your Health

What is dietary fat?

Dietary fat refers to the fats and oils found naturally in animal and plant foods, and those used in cooking, at the table, and added to processed foods.

Dietary fat is made up of fatty acids. There are two main types of fatty acids: saturated and unsaturated. Fats are called saturated or unsaturated depending on how much of each type of fatty acid they contain. For example, butter is a saturated fat because it has mainly saturated fatty acids. Olive oil is an unsaturated fat because it has mainly unsaturated fatty acids.

Saturated fats are solid at room temperature while unsaturated fats are liquid. Unsaturated fats are considered the healthiest type of dietary fat.

Why is fat important?

Dietary fat provides energy and helps with nutrient absorption and brain and nerve function. Fats and oils add flavour and texture to foods and make you feel full longer.

The type of fat you eat can affect your health. Choosing unsaturated instead of saturated fats can help reduce your risk of heart disease.

What are some food sources of fat?

Unsaturated fat

There are 2 main types of unsaturated fats: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Polyunsaturated fats include omega-3 and omega-6 fats.

- Sources of monounsaturated fats include peanuts, nuts, avocados, soft margarines, and oils such as olive, canola, peanut, sunflower and safflower
- Sources of omega-3 polyunsaturated fats include seeds (e.g. flax, chia and hemp),

walnuts, canola oil, and oily fishes such as herring, salmon, mackerel and trout

- Sources of omega-6 polyunsaturated fats include most plant oils (e.g. soybean, corn, peanut, sesame), seeds, nuts, and soft margarines

Saturated fat

Sources of saturated fat include red meats, full-fat milk and milk products (e.g. cream, cheese and butter), lard, shortening, palm, palm kernel and coconut oils, and some processed foods such as packaged snacks and sweets.

Saturated fats are often used in processed foods because they are less likely to go rancid, extending the shelf life of packaged products. Read the food label to see how much saturated fat a food contains.

Trans fat

There are two sources of trans fat: natural and industry-made. Natural sources of trans fat are found in small amounts in milk and meat products.

Industry-made trans fat is formed during the processing of vegetable oils. In the past, the main source of industry-made trans fat were partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. These can no longer be added to foods sold in Canada.

How do I include healthy fat in my diet?

At home

- Cook and bake with vegetable oils, such as olive, canola, or soybean. Use less butter, lard, ghee, shortening, hard margarine, coconut and palm oil
- Cook and bake from scratch using healthy fats more often than buying packaged, ready-made meals, snacks and desserts. Many packaged

products that are low in unhealthy fat are still high in sugar, refined grains and sodium

- Serve fatty fish such as trout, salmon, herring and mackerel
- Choose plant based protein foods such as tofu, nuts, seeds, beans, peas and lentils in place of meat
- Serve healthy fats at the table
 - Drizzle olive, nut or seed oils over vegetables instead of using butter
 - Use soft margarine or natural peanut, nut or seed butters as spreads instead of butter or cream cheese
 - Use oil or yogurt-based salad dressings instead of cream or cheese-based dressings
- Choose yogurt, fruit, popcorn drizzled with oil, and unsalted nuts and seeds for snacks and desserts. Consume less ready-made pastries, cakes, doughnuts, ice cream and fried salty snacks
- Use more vegetables and smaller amounts of meat and cheese when making mixed dishes such as pizza, lasagna, tacos or spaghetti
- Choose skinless poultry and lean cuts of meat such as inside or outside round roast, sirloin roast or steak, pork loin, and wild game including deer, bison, moose and caribou
- Remove some of the fat from meat when possible
 - Trim off visible fat
 - Drain fat after cooking ground meat
- Use the nutrition facts table on food labels to select products that are lowest in saturated and trans fat

- The percent daily value (%DV) tells you if a food has ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ of saturated plus trans fat. 5% DV or less is "a little" and 15% DV or more is "a lot"

When eating out

- Ask your server if nutrition information is available. It may be on the restaurant’s website, pamphlets or posters or directly on the menu. Choose items that are lowest in saturated and trans fat
- Choose foods that are baked, grilled, roasted, poached, sautéed or barbequed rather than deep-fried
- Use lemon and pepper to add flavour to your food instead of sauce or gravy
- Choose tomato based sauces instead of cheese or alfredo sauces
- Order fish or plant-based entrees instead of meat or cheese-based entrees
- Order salads topped with nuts or seeds instead of cheese. Ask for a side of oil-based dressing
- For side dishes, choose a tossed salad with an oil-based dressing or vegetables instead of fries or Caesar salad

For More Information

For nutrition information, call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered dietitian, or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating.

For more healthy eating information, visit [HealthLinkBC File #68a Heart Healthy Eating](#).