



Fats: The Good, The Bad, And The In-Between



By Dr. Tricia Talerico

Nutrition And Weight Loss Center of Ocean

For the next three months, we'll be talking about the three macronutrients (macros) that we consume: proteins, fats and carbohydrates. Technically, water is the fourth macronutrient. Although most foods contain a combination of all three, we generally classify foods according to the predominant macronutrient. By definition, macronutrients are the nutrients required by the body in large amounts, hence the reason that water is the fourth macro. In contrast, micronutrients are mostly vitamins and minerals, equally important but usually consumed in very small amounts. For this issue, we'll take a deep dive into fats and why they are important.

Our bodies need some fat from food. It acts as a major source of energy. It helps us absorb some vitamins and minerals and also contains essential nutrients like Vitamin A, E, D and K. Fat is also needed to build cell membranes and is essential for blood clotting, muscle movement and inflammation. Obviously, some fats are better than others. Good

fats include monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Bad fats include industrial-made trans fats. Saturated fats fall somewhere in between.

Bad fats or **trans fats** are the byproduct of a process called hydrogenation that is used to turn healthy oils into solids to prevent them from becoming rancid. Trans fats were mostly found in solid margarines and vegetable shortening. Eventually, they began appearing in commercial cookies, baked goods and fast-food French fries. Trans fats increase the amount of harmful LDL-C and reduces the amount of beneficial HDL-C. They create inflammation, which has been linked to heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Even small amounts of trans fats can harm our health. For every 2% of daily calories consumed in the form of trans fats, the risk of heart disease increases by 23%. Obviously, trans fats have no health benefits and so, have been officially banned in the U.S.

Let's talk good fats like **mono** and **polyunsaturated fats**. Healthy fats are liquid at room temperature and come mostly from vegetables, nuts, seeds and fish. Good sources of monounsaturated fats (MUFAS) are olive oil, peanut oil, canola oil, avocado, safflower/sunflower oil, olives and most nuts. Remember, every source we look at will have varying opinions about this so take that into consideration. There really is no recommended daily intake of monounsaturated fats, but it is wise to use them as much as possible to replace saturated and trans fats.

Polyunsaturated fats (PUFAS) are mostly household cooking oils such as vegetable oils, canola oils, soybean oil, corn oil and margarine. PUFAS are easily oxidized and unstable, so when heated become even more toxic to our bodies. Chronic consumption of oxidized fats leads to increased inflammation, which contributes to diabetes, hypertension and obesity. PUFAS put stress on our liver, our main organ of detoxification. They can also negatively affect our pancreas and digestion (gut). The more PUFAS we eat, the more prone we are to storing fat. Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids are examples of PUFAs. Omega 3 fatty acids are generally anti-inflammatory and Omega 6 fatty acids are pro-inflammatory. You can consume Omega 3 fatty acids in salmon, walnuts, avocado and coconut oil. Vegetable, soybean, peanut and canola oil all contain Omega 6 fatty acids. It's important to make sure you're eating more Omega 3 fatty acids.

According to the American Heart Association, approximately 5-6% of our daily caloric intake or about 13 grams should come from **saturated fat**. Depending on your source, it is recommended that our **total fat intake** be around 25-35% of our total calories. So, if you're eating 2000 calories a day, that would be around 80 grams of fat. You have to decide for yourself based on health history, exercise regimen and weight goals if this number is too high. Some foods that contain saturated fats are coconut flakes, coconut oil, nuts, olives, fish, seeds and even full fat dairy products. Some research suggests that having higher levels of HDL-C (good cholesterol) is actually cardio-protective.

It can be confusing to navigate the differences between dietary fats. The bottom line is that we need to reduce our intake of trans fats and PUFAS, while increasing the amount of MUFAS and SFAS. As always, the majority of our diet should come from fruits, vegetables and lean protein sources.