

A Guide to Healthy Fats



The low-fat revolution is coming to an end. Although many people have been aware for a long time that low-fat diets are not healthy, or even beneficial for weight loss, this has only recently been talked about in the media. A scientific paper from 2010 reviewed previous studies which lead to the association between saturated fat and heart disease, and concluded that there is no evidence after all! Although excessive intake of any type of food – including foods high

in saturated fats – would be unwise, it is vital to get the new message across to people that extreme low-fat diets are unhealthy. However, not all fats are created equal, and the trick is knowing which ones to go for.

Fats and oils are really one and the same thing, but “fats” is a term used to describe those that are solid at room temperature and “oils” tends to be used for fats that are liquid at room temperature. In addition, they can be broken down into categories depending on the degree of “saturation” – a chemical term used to describe the fundamental structure. Most sources of fat in the diet have a combination of both saturated and unsaturated fatty acids, but usually one predominates. Solid fats are usually comprised of mostly saturated fats. They are more stable and less easy to damage. Oils are predominantly unsaturated fats (both mono and poly-unsaturated) and are much more unstable.

Saturated fats

The main sources of saturated fats are meat, dairy, eggs, coconut oil and palm oil. However, the one to focus on, in terms of including a little in your diet, is coconut oil. It is excellent for cooking and frying as it isn't damaged at high temperatures. Always buy coconut oil from whole food shops, where they not only store it properly, they also ensure you aren't buying the cheaper versions that contain rancid fats.

When buying meat, look for organic, free range meat from grass fed, rather than grain fed, animals. It is a lot more expensive, so you may have to have it less often, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Don't be afraid that you are having too little protein, if you are bulking up on your fruit and vegetables, you'll be getting plenty of protein.



Unsaturated fats – Monounsaturated fatty acids

Monounsaturated fats are found in olives, olive oil, flaxseed oil, sesame oil, walnut and hemp oil, avocados and all nuts and seeds. Rapeseed oil (also known as canola oil) is also high in

monounsaturated fats and has widespread use in processed foods. Please avoid this where possible. For use at home, go for cold pressed, extra virgin olive oil, hemp oil and flaxseed oil. Use them on salads or other cold meals – do not use them frying or cooking at high temperatures, as this damages them. Ensure you store them in a cool, dark place and use within a couple of months. As with saturated fats, use in moderation.

Unsaturated fats – *polyunsaturated fatty acids*

Polyunsaturated fats consist of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. They are completely essential for our health, and play a role in many important body functions including:

Brain function

Circulation and healthy blood vessels

Blood pressure control

Controlling inflammation

These health benefits are derived from the balance between the two fatty acids. Originally it is thought our ancestors consumed a diet that was almost equal in terms of omega-3 and 6. Nowadays, we eat a diet that is extremely high in omega-6 and low in omega-3. In part this is due to the move away from saturated fats to “healthy” vegetable and seed oils such as sunflower oil, which is one of the main sources of omega-6 fatty acids. Omega-6 is also found in grains, which also comprise a large part of the Western diet. This skewing towards the omega-6 pathway leads to inflammatory responses, poor blood sugar control, and cardiovascular disease.

Increasing our intake of omega-3 fats and reducing omega-6 is one of the best things we can do for our health. Good sources of omega-3 include oily fish, ground flax seed, chia seeds and walnuts, but are also found in vegetables in small, but vital, quantities. Grass fed chicken and cattle also contain better ratios of omega-3 to 6. These fatty acids may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and boost our immune system. Three portions of oily fish a week is an excellent addition to the diet. Oily fish include salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies and sardines. Make sure you go for good sources of fish, such as wild caught Alaskan salmon, as fish can also be high in toxic heavy metals. You can also get your higher doses of omega 3s with vegetarian Omega 3 capsules, which source their oils from algae.

Trans fats

Trans fats are a form of unsaturated fat that have undergone hydrogenation. Hydrogenation is the chemical process that changes liquid oils into solid fats. They are used to extend shelf life of processed foods. Any food that contains “hydrogenated oil” or “partially hydrogenated oil” is likely to contain some trans fats, and avoid margarine and butter spreads completely. Trans fats are not easily broken down by the body and can be extremely damaging, having clear links to cardiovascular disease, diabetes and immune dysfunction.



Sources and further information: www.marksdailyapple.com/fats, www.ajcn.nutrition.org, www.independent.co.uk, www.medicalmedium.com