



Facts on Fat

For many years, fat has been the diet villain. Lately, fat intake has been blamed for making Canadians overweight. Some people have even suggested that a tax on fatty foods might solve the problem. If only it was so easy!

Fats are part of most foods and we need to eat some fat to maintain good health. As usual, we are in trouble when we get too much! What makes this seem more complicated is that different fats are reported to have different effects on health, especially heart health.

Type of Fat	Food Sources	Heart Health Effects
Mono-unsaturated	olive oil, canola oil	linked to lower risk of heart disease
Poly-unsaturated	liquid vegetable oils, fish oils	linked to lower risk of heart disease
Cholesterol	meat, butter, eggs, shrimp (<u>never</u> found in plant foods)	little effect on risk for heart disease in healthy people
Saturated	animal foods, coconut oil, palm oil	linked to higher risk of heart disease
“Trans”	shortening, margarine, crackers, cookies	linked to higher risk of heart disease

The information in this chart was summarized from “Dietary Fat and Cholesterol: Lessons from the past decade.” NIN Review, No. 30, 2000. The complete document is available on the NIN Web site at <http://www.nin.ca/Publications/NinReview/rev302000.pdf>

As you can see, some types of fats have health benefits. This is also true about some animal fats, such as “conjugated linoleic acid” (CLA for short), found in milk and milk products. Research suggests that this type of fat may help prevent breast cancer. (For more information, see Kritchevsky D: Antimutagenic and some other effects of conjugated linoleic acid. *Br J Nutr* 2000;83(5):459-465. <http://nutrition.cabweb.org/BJN/journals/contents.asp>)

Since fats have double the energy (Calories) of protein or carbohydrates (starch and sugars), eating less total fat is still important. However, you cannot avoid all fat! So...what should you do?

- Visit your doctor to learn about your risks and create a personalized health plan.
- Choose foods from all four food groups of *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. Fats are found in each food group, so choose the foods that are lowest in fat as often as possible.
- Plan each meal so that whole grain foods, fruit and vegetables make up three quarters of your plate.
- Use vegetable oils for cooking when possible. This will help you replace some saturated and “trans” fats with heart-healthier mono- and poly-unsaturated fats.
- Try a meatless main meal, centred on foods like baked beans or pea soup, once a week.
- Enjoy foods like crackers, cookies, snack cakes and fried treats only once in a while.
- Sauces, gravies and dressings often add fat to a meal. Try to use less, switch to a reduced-fat brand, or replace them with salsa, vegetable chutney, mustard, or another low-fat, high-flavour choice.

Finally, an active lifestyle is very important. Look for little ways to increase your activity each day – it all adds up to better health!

