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Fat and Cholesterol

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Fat

Fats provide the body's most concentrated source of energy. They also supply essential fatty acids required for good health and enable you to absorb certain vitamins (A, D, E, and K). However, most of us tend to consume too much fat since it can be found in many foods.

"Visible" fats account for half of all the fats we eat, such as butter, cream, oil and salad dressings. The rest we cannot see—the fat in a well-marbled meat, eggs, liver, coconut, milk, luncheon meat and cheese. These "invisible" fats are also found in our favorite goodies, such as ice cream, cookies, pastries and crackers.

There are three basic types of fats: **Monounsaturated fats**, **saturated fats**, and **polyunsaturated fats**.

Monounsaturated fats have little effect on blood cholesterol levels. They neither increase or decrease it. Olive and peanut oils are high in monounsaturated fats.

Saturated fats are usually fats of animal origin and are solid at room temperature. These fats may tend to increase blood cholesterol levels. Fats in meat and dairy fats are highly saturated. A few vegetable sources such as coconut and coconut oil, palm oil and cocoa butter (found in chocolate) contain high amounts of saturated fats.

Polyunsaturated fats are usually fats of plant origin and are liquid at room temperature. These fats help decrease the cholesterol level in your blood. Vegetable oils vary in the degree of unsaturation, with safflower oil being the highest in polyunsaturates. Other polyunsaturated vegetable oils are sunflower, corn, cottonseed, soy and sesame seed. Remember, not all vegetable oils are high in polyunsaturated fats: for example, olive, peanut, coconut and palm oils are not. Hydrogenated fats are liquid oils which have been chemically changed into more saturated solid fats, such as shortening or some margarines.

All fats and oils are equally high in calories. For healthy Americans it is recommended that the total not exceed 30-35 percent of calories with ⅓ saturated, ⅓ monounsaturated and ⅓ polysaturated. That means the average individual should limit the total amount and increase polyunsaturates.

Type of Oil or Fat	Percent Poly-unsaturated	Percent Mono-unsaturated	Percent Saturated
Safflower Oil	74	17	9
Sunflower Oil	64	26	10
Corn Oil	58	29	13
Average Vegetable Oil (Soybean & Cottonseed)	40	47	13
Peanut Oil	30	51	19
Chicken Fat (Schmaltz)	26	45	29
Olive Oil	9	77	14
Average Vegetable Shortening	20	48	32
Lard	12	48	40
Beef Fat	4	48	48
Butter	4	35	61
Palm Oil	2	17	82
Coconut Oil	2	12	86

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance manufactured naturally by the body. It is also present in foods we eat. The main dietary sources of cholesterol are foods of animal origin such as cream, butter, most cheese and egg yolk. A limited amount of cholesterol is important for the regulation of certain body functions, but high levels of cholesterol in the bloodstream may form fatty deposits in the arteries. These deposits may slow or block the flow of blood through the body, resulting in a heart attack or stroke.

Studies indicate that cholesterol in the bloodstream can be lowered by controlling the amounts and types of fat we eat. It is suggested that we consume 300 mg or less per day.

Scientists cannot say for sure that lowering your blood cholesterol by eating less saturated fats and cholesterol will prevent or delay heart disease, but many believe that is does help. Eating less total fat is a safe way to reduce calories and cholesterol consumption. And losing weight can reduce the effects of other heart disease risk factors and improve your overall health.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

The consumption of a specific type of polyunsaturated fat, omega-3 fatty acids, has recently been thought to be beneficial in preventing coronary heart disease. Fairly high levels are found in fish. Frequent consumption of fish (two times/week) is recommended although supplements of omega-3 fatty acids are not recommended based on current research findings.

If you want to reduce saturated fat, cholesterol and calories in your family meals, here are some suggestions:

✔1. Choose lean meat, fish, poultry, dry beans and peas as your protein sources.

✔2. Moderate your use of eggs and organ meats (such as liver).

✔3. Limit your intake of butter, cream, hydrogenated margarines, shortenings, and

coconut oil, and foods made from such products.

✔4. Trim excess fat off meats.

✔5. Broil, bake or boil rather than fry in preparing foods.

✔6. Read labels carefully to determine both amount and types of fat contained in foods.

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