

The truth about fat

Fat. You want to eat less of it, maybe even eliminate it from your diet, right? Not so fast. While you should avoid certain fats, some varieties are actually good for you.

Katherine Tallmadge, M.A., R.D., a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association, says certain fats are sources of energy and provide nutrients that help regulate blood pressure, heart rate and the nervous system.

“We do need fats,” Tallmadge says. “But there are healthy fats and unhealthy fats,” so it’s important to understand the difference.

THE GOOD ...

Healthy fats fall into two categories: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Monounsaturated fats, which remain liquid at room temperature, include olive, canola and peanut oils. In addition, avocados and most nuts contain large concentrations of monounsaturated fats, which have been shown to lower the risk of coronary heart disease.

Polyunsaturated fats are typically liquid at room temperature *and* in the refrigerator. Two classes of polyunsaturated fats include omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Omega-3s are found in such foods as salmon, walnuts and flaxseed. “Omega-3s are important for the heart and brain,” Tallmadge says.

And according to some preliminary research, healthy omega-6 fats,

found in nonhydrogenated vegetable and seed oils (safflower and sunflower oils, for example) and whole grains, may help improve rheumatoid arthritis and skin disorders such as psoriasis and eczema.

... AND THE BAD

Unhealthy fats are generally solid at room temperature and include animal fats, found in butter, whole-milk dairy products and red meat, and man-made fats in margarine and shortening. Saturated fat and trans fat are in this category. “These fats raise LDL cholesterol [the “bad” cholesterol] and clog arteries,” Tallmadge says.

The National Academy of Sciences recommends a daily fat intake of no more than 35 percent of total calories. Tallmadge emphasizes looking at the *type* of fats in food instead of total fat content. “Look for foods that are low in saturated and zero in trans fat,” she says. “Total fat isn’t so meaningful.” ■

Keep at It

Want to learn how to reduce the fat in your diet or cook healthier foods? Visit the American Dietetic Association at eatright.org for a new heart-health tip every day.



Where to Start

Katherine Tallmadge, M.A., R.D., a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association, offers these tips on how to start focusing your diet on healthy fats.

- ♦ **Change the way you cook.** Look for recipes that use more oils and less butter. Asian, Mediterranean and low-calorie recipes typically call for less butter.
- ♦ **Think about your salad dressing.** It doesn’t have to be fat-free. Make your own dressing using olive oil as the base, or make sure a healthy oil is one of the first ingredients on the dressing’s label.
- ♦ **Go nuts.** Evidence suggests eating nuts can help you lower cholesterol. Have almonds for your afternoon snack or add walnuts to your next salad.
- ♦ **Mix up your dips.** Opt for yogurt-based dips instead of those heavy on sour cream. Hummus is another great option for a healthy dip.