

Fats of life: part 1

Confused about fat? Don't be. It's really quite simple. There are three naturally occurring types of fat: monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, and saturated. A fourth type of fat, "trans fats" are manmade and not natural. Here's what you need to know about each one:



- **Monounsaturated fat.** These fats should take the lead in your diet (at least, as far as fat is concerned). They star in the so-called Mediterranean diet, proven to lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease. A primary source of mono fats is olive oil. Other good sources include canola oil, seeds and nuts, and avocados.
- **Polyunsaturated fat.** This form of fat is prevalent in vegetable oils, nuts, fish, and some leafy green vegetables. There are two main types of the "polys": omega-6s, which we tend to get plenty of through corn and other vegetable oils, and omega-3s, found primarily in fish and certain seeds, which we rarely get enough of. Omega 3 fatty acids are found in oily fish (herring, salmon, fresh water tuna) and seeds (especially sesame, sunflower, linseed and pumpkin seeds).
- **Saturated fat.** This form of fat is found in the highest amounts in animal products (skin on the chicken, fat on meat, and in meat itself), as well as cream, palm and coconut oil. You'll know a fat is heavy on the saturated side if it's solid at room temperature, like shortening or lard. Saturated fat raises levels of "bad" LDL cholesterol, and can increase your risk of heart disease.
- **Trans fats.** Trans fats are polyunsaturated fats gone very bad. They don't exist in nature, but are created when polyunsaturated fats are whipped with hydrogen to make them solid at room temperature or they are heated. They not only increase LDL levels, but they can decrease HDL ~~good~~ good cholesterol levels. They've been implicated in heart disease and breast cancer. When it comes to trans fat, no level is safe. Yet they're everywhere you find processed foods, including crackers, biscuits, baked goods, brick margarine, vegetable oil spreads, some tub margarines, snacks, and other packaged foods.

Food for thought: All fat should be eaten in moderation – remember if a fat is 'good' for lowering cholesterol or 'good' for preventing heart disease, it does not mean that it is any less 'fattening'!

Go for the natural healthier fats!

No healthy eating plan can do without a daily dose of the correct healthy fats. The benefits of healthy fats are endless. However, they are still fat which means they are energy dense, and for weight management, portion control is important.

Tips for adding healthy fats into your eating plan:

1. Add ONE fat (preferably unsaturated fat) to each meal.
2. Distribute fat intake throughout the day to control blood sugar levels and satiety.
3. Measure and control fat portions for weight control . fat is energy dense and can cause weight gain if consumed in excess, whether good or bad!

- ✓ Add cold pressed oils such as olive or Carotino oil to cooked vegetables, salads, rice, sweet potato or pasta.
- ✓ Spread nut butters, hummus or avocado onto sandwiches as a base . then add various toppings.
- ✓ Add unsalted nuts & seeds to your breakfast cereal or homemade muesli.
- ✓ Sprinkle any seeds over yoghurt and fruit.
- ✓ Add small amounts of olives, avocado slices, nuts and seeds to any salads.
- ✓ Aim to eat fatty fish at least 3 times per week or take a daily omega 3 supplement such as salmon oil.

How much is too much or just enough?

For men: 1 . 2 portions of healthier fats per main meal

For women: 1 portion of healthier fats per main meal

1 portion of good fat = 1 tablespoon nuts or seeds OR 1 teaspoon oil OR 5 olives OR 1 tablespoon peanut butter OR ¼ avocado.

A fishy story: Eat fatty fish at least 3 times per week

These fish provide the essential fatty acid called omega 3. This fat is needed for healthy bodily functions and needs to be obtained through our diet or supplementation as the body cannot make it. It is a fact that most of us have a shortage of this good fat. Omega 3 provided by fatty fish not only reduces mortality rates from heart disease and reduces the risk for strokes but also improves blood flow thus reducing blood clot formation risk, lowers high blood pressure and generally reduces inflammation and thus pain.

Tips to help you consume more omega 3:

- ✓ If you suspect that you are not ingesting sufficient omega-3 fatty acids, make a plan to eat fish at least twice, if not three times a week. You can also switch to using flaxseed, canola or soya oils and start using enriched foods, such as Omega-3 enriched eggs, milk and bread. The following foods and supplements are rich sources of omega 3:
- ✓ Fish - mackerel, herring, salmon, tuna, sardines, anchovies, pilchards, trout.
- ✓ Salmon oil capsules.
- ✓ Plant sources - flaxseed, canola, walnuts, wheatgerm and soya oils.
- ✓ Omega-3 enriched foods - eggs, milk and bread.
- ✓ Eating more fish can be easy. Make fish cakes with mashed pilchards, salmon or sardines, chopped onions, fresh parsley and oatbran . lightly fry in palm fruit oil. Enjoy hot or cold as part of lunch or a snack. TIP: These can be frozen. It's all about choices! When eating out, choose the salmon steak over the shrimp cocktail! Include seasoned fish wrapped in foil for weekend braais.

What to do if you don't eat fish:

- ✓ Make an extra effort to go for the plant based omega 3 rich foods mentioned above.
- ✓ Take an omega 3 fatty acid supplement. Look out for the following on the label: EPA and DHA should be at least 500mg per capsule. Speak to your dietician or medical practitioner to choose the correct dose for you personally.

