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Fats: The Good the Bad and the Ugly

April 2012

IT'S YOUR HEALTH



Fats: The Good the Bad and the Ugly

THE ISSUE



The type and amount of fat you eat are important. You need some fat in your diet, but too much can be bad for your health. Also, some types of fat (saturated and trans fats) may increase your risk of developing heart disease and should be limited.

WHAT IS FAT?

Fat is an important nutrient for your health. It plays many different roles in your body:

- It gives you energy (also called **calories**).
- It helps your body absorb vitamins A, D, E and K.
- It helps your body grow and develop.

There are different kinds of fat in foods:

- the **good**: **unsaturated** (like monounsaturated fat and polyunsaturated fat)
- the **bad**: **saturated**
- the **ugly**: **trans**

While you do need some fat in your diet, it is important not to eat too much and to choose the right type.

THE GOOD: UNSATURATED FATS

Unsaturated fat is a **type of fat** found in the foods you eat. Replacing saturated and trans fats with unsaturated fats has been shown to help lower cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of heart disease. Unsaturated fat also provides omega-3 and -6 fatty acids. Choose foods with unsaturated fat as part of a balanced diet using *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.

Nutrition Facts	
Per 1 slice (33 g)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 100	
Fat 6 g	9 %
Saturated 4 g	
+ Trans 0.2 g	21 %
Cholesterol 15 mg	
Sodium	

Even though it is a “good fat,” having too much unsaturated fat may lead to having too many calories. This may cause weight gain and increase your risk of developing **obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease** and certain types of **cancer**.

There are two main types of unsaturated fats:

1. **monounsaturated fat**, which can be found in:
 - avocados
 - nuts and seeds (like cashews, pecans, almonds and peanuts)
 - vegetable oils (like canola, olive, peanut, safflower, sesame and sunflower)
2. **polyunsaturated fat**, which can be found in:
 - fatty fish (like herring, mackerel, salmon, trout and smelt)
 - fish oils
 - nuts and seeds (like cashews, pecans, almonds and peanuts)
 - vegetable oils (like canola, corn, flaxseed, soybean and sunflower)

THE BAD: SATURATED FATS

Saturated fat is a type of fat found in food. It has been shown to raise LDL or “bad” cholesterol levels. Having high LDL-cholesterol levels increases your risk for heart disease.

Saturated fat is found in many foods:

- animal foods (like beef, chicken, lamb, pork and veal)
- coconut, palm and palm kernel oils
- dairy products (like butter, cheese and whole milk)
- lard
- shortening

Choosing lower-fat meat and dairy products can help reduce the amount of saturated fat in your diet.

Use vegetable oil or soft margarines that are low in saturated and trans fats instead of butter, hard margarine, lard and shortening.

THE UGLY: TRANS FATS

Trans fat is made from a chemical process known as “partial hydrogenation.” This is when liquid oil is made into a solid fat.

Like saturated fat, trans fat has been shown to raise LDL or “bad” cholesterol levels, which increases your risk for heart disease. Unlike saturated fat, trans fat also lowers HDL or “good” cholesterol. A low level of HDL-cholesterol is also a risk factor for heart disease.

Until recently, most of the trans fat found in a typical Canadian diet came from:

- margarines (especially hard margarines)
- commercially fried foods
- bakery products made with shortening, margarine or oils containing partially hydrogenated oils and fats (including cakes, cookies, crackers, croissants, doughnuts, fried and breaded foods, muffins, pastries and other snack foods)

If a product has less than 0.2 grams of trans fat AND less than 0.5 g of saturated fat, the food manufacturer can say that the product is trans-fat-free. Learn more about [nutrition claims](#).

Our food supply is rapidly changing and the trans fat content of many of these products has now been reduced. But it is still important to look at the [Nutrition Facts table](#) to make sure the food product you are buying has only a little or no trans fat.

HEALTH TIPS

In general:

- Eat a small amount of unsaturated fats each day. Limit your intake of saturated and trans fats. Examples of foods with unsaturated fats include: nuts and seeds, fatty fish (like mackerel and salmon), and vegetable oils.



- Use the **% Daily Value (% DV)** in the Nutrition Facts table on food product labels to find out how much fat there is in the food you buy.

At the grocery store:

- Always look at the Nutrition Facts table to choose and compare foods.
- Choose leaner cuts of meat, skinless chicken and turkey. Or remove the skin before cooking.
- Buy fish every week, like herring, mackerel, salmon, sardines and trout.
- Choose lower-fat dairy products.
- Choose soft margarines that are low in saturated and trans fat.
- Buy fewer pre-packaged foods and “ready-to-eat” meals.
- Buy vegetables, fruit and whole grain products with no added fat.

At home:

- Have meat alternatives like beans, lentils, nuts, seeds and tofu.
- Use vegetable oils like canola, olive and soybean.
- Use small amounts of vegetable oils for stir-frying or sautéing. A teaspoon is usually enough.
- Heat oil before frying to prevent the food from soaking up the oil.
- Fill a spray bottle with vegetable oil to spray your pans instead of greasing.
- Substitute soft margarine for hard margarine, butter or lard in baking.



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- Make your own salad dressing with canola or olive oil. Add balsamic, rice wine or other vinegars. Flavour with lemon juice, dry or Dijon mustard, garlic and herbs.

Eating out:

- Check the nutrition information of menu items before you order, and choose foods with less fat. This information may be on the restaurant's website, on a poster, or in a pamphlet at the restaurant.
- Ask for gravy, sauces and salad dressings "on the side." Use only small amounts.
- Order smaller portions or share with someone.

HOW MUCH FAT DO I NEED?

The amount of fat you need each day depends on your age.

Recommended amount of fat (as a percentage of total daily calories)

Young children (ages 1 to 3)	30% to 40%
Children and teens (ages 4-18)	25% to 35%
Adults (aged 19 and older)	20% to 35%

The best way to achieve these recommendations is by following [Canada's Food Guide](#).

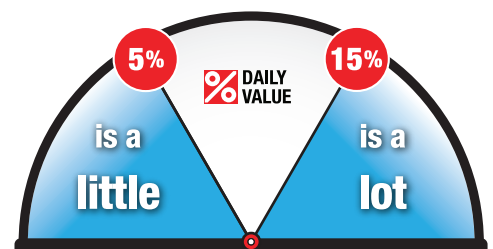
UNDERSTANDING THE % DAILY VALUE

The **Daily Value** for the amount of fat used in nutrition labelling is 65 g (based on a 2,000 calorie diet).

For example, if a product's Nutrition Facts table shows 8 g of fat, the % Daily Value for fat is 12%.

$$(8 \text{ g} \div 65 \text{ g}) \times 100 = 12\%$$

So if you eat this product, you will take in 12% of the recommended daily total of fat.



Remember:

5% DV or less is a little

15% DV or more is a lot

Canada

The amount of total fat listed in the Nutrition Facts table includes all of the different types of fat.

Food manufacturers do not have to list unsaturated fats in the Nutrition Facts table. But if you add the amount of saturated and trans fats together, then subtract that number from the total fat, you will find the amount of unsaturated fat.

For example, in the Nutrition Facts table below:

- Total fat content is 8 g.
- The sum of saturated and trans fat is 1 g.
- This product therefore has 7 g of fat coming from unsaturated fat.

Margarine

The **Daily Value** for the amount of saturated fat and trans fat combined used in nutrition labeling is 20 g (based on a 2,000 calorie diet).

Nutrition Facts	
Per 2 tsp (10 g)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 70	
Fat 8 g	12 %
Saturated 1 g	5 %
+ Trans 0 g	
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 65 mg	3 %
Carbohydrate 0 g	0 %
Fibre 0 g	0 %
Sugars 0 g	
Protein 0 g	
Vitamin A 10 %	Vitamin C 0 %
Calcium 0 %	Iron 0 %

For example, if a product's Nutrition Facts table shows 1 g of saturated fat and 0 g of trans fat, the % Daily Value for saturated fat and trans fat combined is 5%.

$$(1 \text{ g} \div 20 \text{ g}) \times 100 = 5\%$$

So if you eat this product, you will take in 5% of the recommended daily total of saturated and trans fat.

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE

Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada are committed to helping Canadians improve their health and well-being. We do this by promoting regular **physical activity** and **healthy eating**. We study and create guidance for both nutrition and exercise, and work with partners to prevent and control diseases. As part of this effort, Health Canada introduced mandatory nutrition labelling in 2005 for pre-packaged foods, including the labelling of trans fats. This helps Canadians make healthy food choices and encourages manufacturers to stop using trans fats in their products.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- *Eating well with Canada's Food Guide* at: www.health.gc.ca/foodguide
- Using the Nutrition Facts table: % Daily Value at: www.health.gc.ca/dailyvalue
- Interactive Tools – Nutrition Labelling at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/nutrition/cons/dv-vq/interact-eng.php
- *It's Your Health, Trans Fats* at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/trans-eng.php

- Public Health Agency of Canada, **Cardiovascular Disease** at: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/cvd-mcv/index-eng.php
- **Heart & Stroke Foundation** at: www.heartandstroke.com

FOR INDUSTRY AND PROFESSIONALS

- Health Canada, **Food and Nutrition** at: www.health.gc.ca/food
- Health Canada, **Food and Nutrition Surveillance** at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/surveill/index-eng.php
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency, **Food Labelling and advertising** at: www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/labeti/labetie.shtml

RELATED RESOURCES

- For safety information about food, health and consumer products, visit the **Healthy Canadians** website at: www.healthycanadians.gc.ca
- For more articles on health and safety issues go to the *It's Your Health* web section at: www.health.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*

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