

What is Fat?

Our body needs us to consume some fat in order to work properly. Fat comes from a variety of sources, including dairy, meats, nuts, and oils. It can also be found in many fried, baked, and pre-packaged foods.

Fat is a major source of energy and helps our bodies absorb vitamins. It is also important for proper growth, and for keeping us healthy. A completely fat-free diet would not be healthy, yet it is important that fat be consumed in moderation.

It is important to keep in mind that fat has the most calories compared to any other nutrient. Controlling fat intake is one of the most important steps in losing or maintaining weight and preventing type 2 diabetes.

How does fat affect my health?

Since our bodies only need a certain amount of fat each day, any extra that we eat is stored in fat tissue and causes us to gain weight. Fat can also be healthy or unhealthy for our heart, depending on which kind we eat.

What are the different types of fat, and which are healthy?

There are four main types of fat:

- 1. Monounsaturated fat
 - 2. Polyunsaturated fat
 - 3. Saturated fat
 - 4. Trans fat
- HEALTHY fats**
- UNHEALTHY fats**

The goal is to try to **choose more of the healthier fats, eat fewer unhealthy fats, and stay within your fat gram goal.**

Healthy Fats: Omega-3, Monounsaturated, and Polyunsaturated

Omega-3 fats are an especially “heart healthy” fat and can help with lowering high triglyceride values in your blood. Omega-3 fats can be found in:

- **Fish:** salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines, albacore tuna, and rainbow trout
- **Tofu** and other soybean products
- **Walnuts**
- **Flaxseed** and flaxseed oil
- **Canola oil**

Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are considered “heart healthy” and can help with improving cholesterol. Some sources of these fats include:

- **Avocado**
- **Nuts and seeds:** almonds, cashews, pecans, peanuts, pine nuts, pumpkin, sunflower, or sesame seeds
- **Olive oil and olives**
- **Oils:** vegetable oils (such as sunflower, safflower, corn, soybean, and cottonseed)
- **Peanut butter**

Source: American Diabetes Association

Fats to Avoid: Saturated and Trans Fat

Saturated Fats are mainly found in foods that come from animals (such as meat and dairy), but they can also be found in most fried foods and some pre-packaged foods. Saturated fats are unhealthy because they increase LDL (“bad” cholesterol) levels in your body and increase your risk for heart disease. Many saturated fats are “solid” fats that you can see, such as the fat in meat. Other sources of saturated fats include:

- High-fat **cheeses**
- High-fat cuts of **meat**
- Whole-fat **milk** and **cream**
- **Butter**
- **Icecream** and ice cream products
- **Palm** and **coconutoils**



Trans fat is simply liquid oils turned into solid fats during food processing. There is also a small amount of trans fat that occurs naturally in some meat and dairy products, but those found in processed foods tend to be the most harmful to your health.

Trans fats serve up a double whammy to your cholesterol, by increasing LDL (“bad” cholesterol) and decreasing HDL (“healthy” cholesterol).

In order to avoid trans fat, look on nutrition labels for ingredients such as “**partially hydrogenated**” oils or **shortening**. In addition, look for trans fat in the nutritional information in products, such as commercially baked desserts, crackers, and fried foods.

Identifying Healthier Alternatives

Foods High in Saturated Fat Instead of...	Healthier Alternatives Use...
Butter, lard, shortening, coconut, coconut oil, palm oil	Margarine (look for 0 grams of trans fat on label), vegetable oil spread, olive oil, canola oil, corn oil, cooking spray
Whole milk, 2% milk, half & half, cream	Skim, 1%, fat-free half & half
Red meat, ground beef, sausage, bacon, organ meats (such as liver, kidney)	White meat chicken, turkey, pork chop with fat trimmed, ground beef sirloin, fish, soy products, nuts/seeds or beans
Poultry skin, visible meat fat	Skinless and trimmed meats
Fried or pan fried foods	Grilled, baked, roasted, steamed, broiled, boiled
Deli meats like bologna, pepperoni, salami	Deli ham, turkey, chicken breast or extra lean roast beef
Whole eggs or egg yolks	Egg substitute or egg whites
Ice cream	Frozen yogurt, sherbet, low-fat ice cream
Cheese, cottage cheese, sour cream, cream cheese, whipped cream	Fat-free or reduced fat version
Chocolates, pies, doughnuts, brownies, buttered popcorn	Sugar-free pudding made with 1% or skim milk, vanilla wafers, animal crackers, low-fat microwave popcorn

Tips for Choosing the Best Types of Fat

Limit the amount of fat you eat, but don't try to cut it out completely. Focus on reducing foods high in saturated fat, and trans fat. Always remember to stay within your fat gram goal.

Here are a few more tips for choosing the best types of fat:

- ☑ Choose leaner cuts of meat that do not have much visible fat. Leaner cuts include round cuts and sirloin cuts. Trim visible fat off meats before eating.
- ☑ Sauté with olive oil or canola oil instead of butter.
- ☑ Use olive oil in salad dressings and marinades.
- ☑ Use canola oil when baking.
- ☑ When re-heating soups or stews, skim the solid fats from the top before heating.
- ☑ Sprinkle slivered nuts or sunflower seeds on salads instead of bacon bits.
- ☑ Snack on a small handful of nuts rather than potato chips or processed crackers.
- ☑ Try peanut butter or other nut-butter spreads (which do not contain trans fat) on celery, bananas, or low-fat crackers.
- ☑ Add slices of avocado rather than cheese to your sandwich.
- ☑ Once or twice a week prepare fish, such as salmon or mackerel, instead of meat.