

Fats 101



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Does my body need fats?



Yes, it does. Dietary fats are essential to give your body energy and to support cell growth. They also help protect your organs and help keep your body warm. Fats help your body absorb some nutrients and produce important hormones, too.

Your body definitely needs fat – but not as much fat as most people eat. Find out your personal daily fat limits on [My Fats Translator](#).

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How many different fats are there?



There are four major dietary fats in the foods we eat: [saturated fats](#), [trans fats](#), [monounsaturated fats](#) and [polyunsaturated fats](#). The four types have different chemical structures and physical properties. The bad fats, saturated and *trans* fats, tend to be more solid at room temperature (like a stick of butter), while monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats tend to be more liquid (like liquid vegetable oil).



Fats can also have different effects on the [cholesterol](#) levels in your body. The bad fats, saturated fats and *trans* fats raise bad cholesterol (LDL) levels in your blood. Monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats can lower bad cholesterol levels and are beneficial when consumed in moderation.

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Do all fats have the same number of calories?




There are nine calories in every gram of fat, regardless of what type of fat it is. That's a lot of calories compared to carbohydrates and

proteins, which contain four calories per gram.

Because fats are so energy-dense, consuming high levels of fat – regardless of the type – can lead to taking in too many calories. That can lead to weight gain or being overweight. Consuming high levels of saturated or *trans* fats can also lead to heart disease and stroke. Health experts generally recommend replacing saturated fats and *trans* fats with monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats – while still limiting the total amount of fat you consume.

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Are all foods labeled “*trans* fat-free” healthy foods?

 Not necessarily. Foods labeled “0 *trans* fat” or cooked with “*trans* fat-free” oils may contain a lot of saturated fats, which raise your bad cholesterol levels. “*Trans* fat-free” foods may also be unhealthy in terms of their general nutrient content. For example, baked goods tend to be high in added sugars and low in nutrients.



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Can fats be part of a healthy diet?

 Eating foods with a moderate amount of fat is definitely part of a healthy diet. Just remember to balance the amount of calories you eat with the amount of calories you burn. Aim to eat more vegetables, fruits, whole-grain/high-fiber foods, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, lean meats, poultry, and fish (at least twice a week). Doing so means that your diet will be low in both saturated fats and *trans* fats.



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Does eating more healthfully mean giving up my favorite foods?

 A healthy diet can include the foods you love. You don’t have to avoid sugary or salty treats entirely, but you do need to eat less of these foods since they’re low in nutrition and high in calories. For practical tips, learn how to [Live Fat-Sensibly](#).

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