

## Consumer FAQ - General Information about Fats

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### What are the different fats and which foods contain them?

These are the major fats in foods: [saturated fats](#) and [trans fats](#), and [monounsaturated fats](#) and [polyunsaturated fats](#). Appearance-wise, saturated and *trans* fats tend to be more solid at room temperature (think of butter or traditional stick margarine), while monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats tend to be liquid (think soybean or corn oil) at room temperature. Here are the main food sources of these fats:

#### “Bad” Fats (Saturated and *Trans* Fats)

**Saturated:** Saturated fats occur naturally in many foods. The majority we eat come mainly from animal sources, meat and dairy (milk fat) such as fatty beef, lamb, pork, poultry with skin, beef fat (tallow), lard and cream, butter, cheese, and other dairy products made from whole or reduced-fat (2%) milk. These foods also contain cholesterol. Many baked goods and fried foods can also contain high levels of saturated fats. Some plant foods, such as palm oil, palm kernel oil, and coconut oil, also contain primarily saturated fats, but do not contain cholesterol.

***Trans:*** *Trans* fats are found in many foods. About 20–25 percent come from animal fat and 75–80 percent come from partially hydrogenated fat – especially in commercial baked goods (pastries, biscuits, muffins, cakes, pie crusts, doughnuts and cookies) and fried foods (French fries, fried chicken, breaded chicken nuggets and breaded fish), snack foods (popcorn, crackers), and other foods made with partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, traditional vegetable shortening or stick margarine. (Soft margarines typically contain very low levels of *trans* fats.)

#### “Better” Fats (Unsaturated Fats)

The unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated) are also found in many foods. Vegetable oils, nuts, and seafood are recommended sources of these fats.

**Monounsaturated:** Canola oil, olive oil, peanut oil, sunflower oil, avocados, and many nuts and seeds.

**Polyunsaturated:** A number of vegetable oils (soybean oil, corn oil and safflower oil), oily fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel, herring and trout), and most nuts and seeds. The polyunsaturated fats are either from the omega-3 (for example, seafood) or omega-6 (for example, most vegetable oils) family.

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**What effects do the different fats have on heart health?**

The different fats affect heart disease risk differently. The “bad” fats, [saturated fats](#) and [trans fats](#), raise LDL (low-density lipoproteins or “bad” cholesterol) levels in your blood and increase your risk of developing heart disease. Compared to other fats, *trans* fats may lower HDL (high-density lipoproteins or “good” cholesterol) levels in your blood.

The “better” fats, [monounsaturated fats](#) and [polyunsaturated fats](#), can help lower blood cholesterol levels when they replace saturated and *trans* fats in the diet and may lower your risk of developing heart disease when they are consumed in moderation.

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**How much fat should I eat a day?**

The total amount of fats you eat each day should be about 25–35 percent of your total daily calories. Within those limits, keep the saturated fats you eat to less than 7 percent of total daily calories and your *trans* fat consumption to less than 1 percent. In order to get enough fish-derived omega-3 fatty acids, eat at least two fish meals a week. Translating these percentages into numbers, that means if you eat 2,000 total calories a day, your daily limits should be:

- approximately 56–78 grams (500–700 of those calories) from fats;
- less than 16 grams (less than 140 of those calories) from saturated fats; and
- less than 2 grams (less than 20 of those calories) from *trans* fats.

Most of the fats you eat should be the “better” fats – monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats. However, be sure not to eat more than recommended amounts of total calories from any food sources (fats, carbohydrates, or protein), which could lead to weight gain. Find out your personal daily calorie and fat limits on [My Fats Translator](#).

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**In a practical sense, how can I follow your recommendation of eating a diet containing 25–35 percent of calories as fat, with less than 7 percent as saturated fat and less than 1 percent as *trans* fat and get enough omega-3 fatty acids?**

We recommend following a healthy dietary pattern – one that balances the amount of calories you consume with the amount of calories you burn. The diet should emphasize a variety of fruits, vegetables, and grain products, especially whole grains; fat-free and low-fat dairy products, legumes, poultry, and lean meats; and eat fish, preferably oily fish, at least twice a week. In addition, you should limit your consumption of beverages and foods with added sugars and high-calorie snacks, and choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Choosing smaller portion sizes is also very important to control your total calories and weight. These recommendations should be followed when you eat and dine outside the home. For more information, see our [2006 Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations](#).

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**How can I find out how many calories I should eat?**

The number of calories you should eat each day is based on your age, gender, height, weight, and physical activity level, and whether you’re trying to lose, gain or maintain your weight. Too much of even ‘healthy’ foods will result in weight gain or undermine efforts to lose weight. Find out your personal daily calorie and fat limits on [My Fats Translator](#).

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**Does eating “good” fats instead of “bad” fats help me lose weight?**

No, all fats have the same amount of calories per gram—about double the amount in a gram of carbohydrate or protein. Regardless of the source, if you eat more calories than you need you will gain weight. In terms of dietary fats, it's important to replace the “bad” fats (saturated and *trans* fats) with the “better” fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats) to reduce your risk of heart disease, while also controlling the total amount of calories you eat. To help reduce calories and lose weight, reduce portion sizes, cut down on high-calorie between-meal snacks and desserts, beverages and foods with added sugars, and pick reduced-fat or low-fat varieties of meat and dairy products. For more information, see our [2006 Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations](#). For practical tips, learn how to [Live Fat-Sensibly](#).

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#### **Do I need to cut out all my favorite “bad” foods?**

No, but consider sweets, such as candy and cake, and fatty or salty foods, such as fried foods and snack chips, as treats that you eat only once in a while instead of often. These foods tend to be low in essential nutrients and high in calories. Remember to check the fat and calorie content so you can stay within our recommended limits for total, saturated fats, and *trans* fats. When possible, make choices that contain the lower amounts of saturated fats and *trans* fats.

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#### **Is margarine better for me than butter?**

Soft (tub) or liquid margarines are generally a better choice than butter if you choose a margarine which does not contain *trans* fats. Butter is high in saturated fats and contains cholesterol, both of which increase your blood cholesterol levels. Most margarines are made with vegetable fats and contain no cholesterol, and many margarines (especially softer tub margarines) no longer contain *trans* fats. However, traditional hard (stick) margarines contain substantial amounts of *trans* fats. Generally, the softer the margarine is, the less saturated and *trans* fats it contains. However, always check the food label to be informed of the amount of saturated and *trans* fat content in a serving.

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