

# IN THE KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

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Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service-Lubbock County \* PO Box 10536 \* Lubbock, TX 79408  
 916 Main, Suite 201 Lubbock, TX 79401 \* 775-1740 \* Fax 775-1758 \* <http://lubbock.agrilife.org>

## *Are All Fats Bad?*

### Facts about Fat

It was once taught that we should avoid all fat at all times because it is bad for us. This statement is both true and false. We know now that there are some types of fats that are bad for us and some fats that are actually good for us. Our body makes fat when we eat too many calories as a way to save energy for later. Fat has the most calories per gram (9kcal/g) of all the major nutrients, so it is important that we eat the right amount so we don't gain any extra weight. Almost every food we eat has some kind of fat in it so it is important to learn which we should eat more of and what kinds of fat we should eat less of.



### Why Do We Need Fat?

Fat is an important macronutrient that helps the body carry out many important functions such as:

- Help absorb certain vitamins
  - Vitamins A,D,E,K
- Store energy
- Maintain healthy skin
- Helps the brain function properly
  - The brain uses many essential fats
- Blood clotting
- Through Vitamin K
- Keeping you fuller longer
- Many others!

### “Bad” Fats

There are two types of fats that have been seen to have negative effects on our health, saturated fats and trans-fats. Eating a large amount of these fats in your diet may put you at risk for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, Type 2 Diabetes, and other cardiovascular risk factors.

Trans-Fat in particular is seen as the worst of all because there are no health benefits and has been seen in research to cause most of the complications mentioned above. More specifically, trans-fats increase inflammation in the body which can lead to the insulin resistance seen in Type 2 Diabetes among other things. Foods high in trans-fats are fried foods, margarine, and frozen pastry items among several others. Less than 2% of total calories is recommended per day.

Saturated fats are not as harmful to our health as trans-fats but still carry many of the same risks if consumed in excess. Saturated fats are solid at room temperature. Whole-milk, red meat, butter and coconut oil are common sources of saturated fats. It is recommended to keep saturated fat consumption to less than 10% of total calories per day.

## “Good” Fats

Fats that are not saturated, or liquid at room temperature are the healthier types of fats and they come in two forms: polyunsaturated and monounsaturated. Foods that are high in these kinds of fats are vegetables, nuts, seeds, and fish.

Monounsaturated fats (MUFA) can be found in nuts, olive oil, and avocados. This type of fat is the main fat seen in the Mediterranean Diet which has been seen to reduce risk for heart disease by improving cholesterol levels. A combination of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are recommended to replace trans-fats and saturated fats in your diet.

Polyunsaturated fats (PUFA) are the essential fats which means we need to eat this kind of fat in order to be healthy because the body cannot produce this by itself. Most oils we use are polyunsaturated fats with the exception of olive oil. PUFA's can also help reduce the risk for heart disease and may also help prevent Type 2 diabetes. Omega-3 fatty acids are in this group of fat which is famous for reducing inflammation and risk for coronary heart disease.

### What Changes Should I Be Making?

When considering what you should be eating it is important to eat more MUFA and PUFA as opposed to saturated fats and trans-fats. Also, even though PUFA and MUFA are considered healthy fats it is important that you do not overeat them because they are high in calories and may cause excessive weight gain.

- Avoid trans-fats as much as possible
  - Partial-hydrogenation should be avoided on a label
- Use liquid fats instead of solid fats more often
  - Less butter and more oil in recipes
- Bake or broil instead of frying meats and vegetables
- Substitute chicken or fish instead of red meat once or twice a week
- When snacking choose nuts or vegetables with nut or seed butter instead of chips
- Fat should be 25-35% of your calories each day.

Very low fat diets should be avoided for long periods of time. Very low fat diets will leave you feeling hungry and will leave you without many essential nutrients. Not eating fat will leave you hungry which may lead to you eating more than you normally would.



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Created by: Raul Palacios, TTU Dietetic Intern 2017

For More Information contact:  
E. Kay Davis, CEA-FCS, Lubbock County, 806-775-1740