



Fats

Though too much fat can be unhealthy, certain kinds of fat are good for us and are an important part of a healthy diet.

What Are Fats?

Fats are nutrients in food that the body uses to build nerve tissue (including the brain and nerves) and hormones. The body also uses fat as fuel. If fats eaten aren't burned as energy or used as building blocks, they're stored by the body in fat cells. This is the body's way of thinking ahead: By saving fat for future use, it plans for times when food might be scarce.

Fat gives food flavor and texture, but it's also high in calories and excess amounts of fatty foods can cause many health problems.

For kids and teens, desserts and snacks (including potato chips, chocolate, cakes, doughnuts, pastries, and cookies) are a significant source of fat. Kids also get fat from whole-milk products and high-fat meats, such as bacon, hot dogs, and fattier cuts of red meat.

Fast-food and takeout meals tend to have more fat than home cooking; and in restaurants, fried dishes are the highest in fat content. Fat also often "hides" in foods in the form of creamy, cheesy, or buttery sauces or dressings.

However, healthy fats at the recommended daily amounts are an important part of a nutritious diet for both kids and adults.

Why Are Some Fats Healthy?

Getting enough healthy fats is essential for growth and development. Young kids, in particular, need enough of them in their diet to help the brain and nervous system develop normally.

Besides supplying fuel for the body, fats:

- help the body absorb some vitamins (vitamins A, D, E, and K are fat soluble, meaning they can only be absorbed if there's fat in a person's diet)
- are the building blocks of hormones
- insulate all nervous system tissues in the body
- help people feel full, so they're less likely to overeat

Fat is a great source of energy, but does have twice the amount of calories as carbohydrates or protein. For example, 1 gram of fat provides 9 calories, whereas 1 gram of carbohydrates or protein provide 4 calories.

What Kinds of Fats Are in Food?

To help you figure out fats, here's a look at the three major types:

1. Unsaturated fats: Found in plant foods and fish, these are seen as neutral or even beneficial to heart health. Unsaturated fats are:

- **monounsaturated**, found in avocados and olive, peanut, and canola oils
- **polyunsaturated**, found in most vegetable oils
- **omega-3 fatty acids**, a type of polyunsaturated fat found in oily fish like tuna and salmon

2. Saturated fats: Found in meat and other animal products, such as butter, shortening, lard, cheese, and milk (except skim or nonfat). Coconut oil is also high in saturated fat, but it has a different structure than saturated fats found in animal products. Coconut oil has become popular due to its health benefits; however, olive and canola oils are more heart-healthy. Eating too much saturated fat can raise blood cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease.

3. Trans fats: Found in some stick margarines, commercial snack foods, baked goods, and some commercially fried foods. Trans fats (also called trans fatty acids) are created when vegetable oils are hydrogenated (meaning

that hydrogen atoms are added to the fat molecule so they remain solid at room temperature). Trans fats can raise cholesterol and increase the risk of heart disease. Food manufacturers must list trans fats on food labels, but may also refer to them as "partially hydrogenated" oils on the ingredient list. Many companies now make margarines (or vegetable oil spreads) without trans fats.

How Are Fats Listed on Labels?

When shopping for food and reading labels, remember that it's easy to eat a portion that's larger than the serving size on the label. A bag of corn chips might list 12 chips as a serving size, but kids often eat two or three times that amount. So be sure to pay attention to serving sizes.

When it comes to fat, food packages can say many things, such as fat-free, low-fat, reduced fat, and light (or lite). The government has strict rules about the use of two of these phrases. By law:

- **fat-free** foods can contain no more than 0.5 grams of fat per serving
- **low-fat** foods may contain 3 grams of fat or less per serving

Reduced-fat and light (lite) foods are a little trickier and you may need to do some supermarket math. Light (lite) and reduced-fat foods may still be high in fat.

- A **light (lite) food** must contain 50% less fat or one third fewer calories per serving than the regular version of that food.
- A **reduced-fat food** must contain 25% less fat per serving than the regular version.

But if the regular version of a particular food was high in fat to begin with, a reduction may not lower the fat content enough to make it a smart snacking choice. If the original version of a brand of peanut butter contains 16 grams of fat and the reduced fat version contains 12 grams, that's still a lot of fat!

And don't expect the label to tell all. The percentage of fat in a food isn't always listed on the label. But you can calculate it — divide the number of calories from fat by the number of total calories and multiply by 100. For example, if a 300-calorie food has 60 calories from fat, you divide 60 by 300 and then multiply by 100. The result shows that that food gets 20% of its calories from fat.

How Much Fat Should Kids Get?

Healthy fats are a vital part of a child's diet, and they should not be excessively limited or banned. For young kids, especially, fat and cholesterol play important roles in brain development. And for those under 2 years old, fat should *not* be restricted. Generally, kids should eat a varied diet with about one third of calories coming from fat.

How Can I Keep Fats Under Control?

Eating adequate amounts of fat is an important part of a healthy diet. But it's true that many kids today eat too much fat, which might lead to unwanted weight gain. Kids who carry excess weight into adulthood have greater risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes, among other things.

Here are some ways to keep fat intake within the recommended ranges:

- Serve foods that are naturally low in fat, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and fish, and low-fat dairy products.
- Choose healthier, unsaturated fats when preparing meals and reduce the amount you use (for example, 1 teaspoon of canola oil, ¼ cup nuts, or ¼ of an avocado).
- When cooking meat, fish, or poultry, opt for broiling, grilling, or roasting (on a rack). These methods allow the fat to drip away during cooking, which cuts down on calories too. Frying, on the other hand, adds fat. Remove skin from poultry.
- Beware of reduced-fat and low-fat claims. These products often have more sugar added and just as many calories.
- Pack school lunches and meals for family outings instead of going to fast-food restaurants or relying on your kids to make healthy choices in the school cafeteria.
- When dining out, help kids make balanced choices that don't include large amounts of fat. For example, make a green salad part of the order and use low-fat dressing on the side. Encourage choosing mustard instead of mayonnaise on sandwiches. Choose baked, grilled, or steamed dishes rather than fried. Limit visits to fast-food restaurants.

The most effective way to teach kids healthy eating habits is to set a good example yourself. Making sensible eating a habit, choosing foods wisely, and exercising regularly are the keys to a healthy lifestyle.

Reviewed by: Jane M. Benton, MD, MPH
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1. Fats are nutrients in food that the body uses to build nerve tissue and _____.
2. Fat gives food flavor and texture, but it's also high in _____ and excess amounts of fatty foods can cause many health problems.
3. Fast-food and takeout meals tend to have less fat than home cooking. True or False?
4. Young kids need enough fats in their diet to help the brain and _____ develop normally.
5. Omega-3 fatty acids is a type of _____ fat found in oily fish like tuna and salmon.
6. _____ can raise cholesterol and increase the risk of heart disease.
7. Fat-free foods can contain no more than 0.5 grams of fat per serving. Low-fat foods may contain 3 grams of fat or less per serving. True or False?
8. For young kids, fat and cholesterol play important roles in _____ development.
9. Kids who carry excess weight into _____ have greater risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes, among other things.
10. Beware of reduced-fat and low-fat claims. These products often have more _____ added and just as many calories.

May 2019 Quiz Answers. 1.Bacteria 2.Expiration Date 3.False 4.Two
5.Refrigerator/Microwave 6.Pesticides 7.True 8.Sanitized 9.False 10.
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