

Good Fats and Bad Fats

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The fact is: we all need fats. Fats help nutrient absorption, nerve transmission, maintaining cell membrane integrity etc. However, when consumed in excess amount, fats contribute to weight gain, heart disease and certain types of cancer. Fats are not created equal. Some fats promote our health positively while some increase our risks of heart disease. The key is to replace bad fats with good fats in our diet.

The Bad Fats

- Saturated Fats

Saturated fats raise total blood cholesterol as well as LDL cholesterol (the bad cholesterol). Saturated fats are mainly found in animal products such as meat, dairy, eggs and seafood. Some plant foods are also high in saturated fats such as coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oil.

- Trans Fats

Trans fats are invented as scientists began to "hydrogenate" liquid oils so that they can withstand better in food production process and provide a better shelf life. As a result of hydrogenation, trans fatty acids are formed. Trans fatty acids are found in many commercially packaged foods, commercially fried food such as French Fries from some fast food chains, other packaged snacks such as microwaved popcorn as well as in vegetable shortening and hard stick margarine.

The Good Fats

- Monounsaturated Fats

Monounsaturated fats lower total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol (the bad cholesterol) and increase the HDL cholesterol (the good cholesterol). Nut, canola and olive oils are high in monounsaturated fats.

- Polyunsaturated Fats

Polyunsaturated fats also lower total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol.

Seafood like salmon and fish oil, as well as corn, soy, safflower and sunflower oils are high in polyunsaturated fats. Omega 3 fatty acids belong to this group.

What can we do?

- avoid using cooking oils that are high in saturated fats and/or trans fats such as coconut oil, palm oil or vegetable shortening. Instead, use oils that are low in saturated fats and high in mono- and polyunsaturated fats such as canola oil, olive oil and flax seed oil.
- minimize using commercially packaged foods which are high in trans fats. Always read labels to look for trans-fat free alternatives.
- as saturated fats are found in animal products, use lower-fat version dairy such as 1% or skim milk instead of whole milk. Trim visible fats and skins from meat products.