

# the facts on fat

With all the negative comments about fat in the diet, you may think that all fats are bad – but this is not the case. Healthy fats are essential for good health, and may help even protect you from a range of diseases such as cancer and heart disease. The key is to understand which fats to include and which fats to reduce.

## What Can Fat Do?

Fat performs a number of vital functions in the body:

- ◇ Fat is a concentrated source of energy.
- ◇ Foods containing fat supply fat-soluble vitamins such as vitamin A, D and E and fatty acids, like omega-3's, and are used to make certain hormones.
- ◇ The body needs fat to cushion the internal organs, protect bones and nerves, and provide insulation.
- ◇ Essential fatty acids (EFAs), benefit your heart, metabolism and immune system.
- ◇ Some EFAs are used by the body for structural, hormonal and electrical functions rather than for energy. These EFAs increase metabolic rate.
- ◇ The presence of fats in food can greatly increase their flavour and palatability.

## Daily Fat Requirements

<b>Adolescents (13-19 yrs)</b>	70 grams/day
<b>Adult Women</b>	50 - 60 grams/day
<b>Adult Men</b>	60 - 70 grams/day

## Types of Fats in Our Diet

**Saturated fats:** Found in animal-based foods, e.g. full-cream dairy products and fatty meats (including skin on chicken). Also found in palm and coconut oils. Saturated fats may increase the level of total cholesterol in our blood and reducing foods high in saturated fats can help ensure we maintain good heart health.

**Monounsaturated fats:** Found in olives and olive oil, peanuts, avocados and canola oil. Decrease total cholesterol and help to increase “good” cholesterol in our blood. They also have anti-inflammatory properties.

**Polyunsaturated fats:** Found mainly in popular plant based oils like sunflower and safflower and most soft margarine's. Polyunsaturated fats are much like monounsaturated fats in helping to maintain good heart health. But this group can be divided into two further categories: omega-6 and omega-3.

**Hydrogenated fats** do not occur naturally so are more difficult for the body to process. They are found in margarine and higher-fat junk food and should be taken in limited amounts.

## Omega-3 Fats

Health authorities recommend that we consume more omega-3 fats. Omega-3 fats are found in:



- ◇ Canola oils or margarines
- ◇ Walnuts & linseeds, soybeans
- ◇ Soy beverages enriched with omega-3
- ◇ Oily fish - such as sardines, mackerel, or Atlantic salmon
- ◇ Dark green vegetables - spinach & green peas.

Omega-3 fats may help to:

- ◇ Reduce blood triglyceride (blood fat) levels
- ◇ Regulate heart rhythm
- ◇ Prevent the formation of blood clots
- ◇ Assist with rheumatoid arthritis
- ◇ Reduce high blood pressure
- ◇ Assist with inflammatory bowel disease.

Omega-3's are also recommended for the relief of **depression** and other psychiatric disorders. Over 50% of our brain is lipid, 35% of which is polyunsaturated. Sufficient amounts of omega-3 rich foods are essential for healthy neurotransmission and prostaglandin formation, both indicators of mental wellbeing.

Present evidence recommends omega-3 intakes of 2000 -4000 mg/day. An average intake of 2000mg can be obtained from either of the following:

- ◇ 105g canned pink salmon
- ◇ 95g canned red salmon
- ◇ 80g fresh salmon
- ◇ 100g smoked salmon



## Tips For a Healthy Fat Intake

- Use salad dressings, margarine spreads and mayonnaise made from oils such as canola, sunflower, soy and olive oils.
- Have fish (any type of fresh or canned) at least twice a week, preferably salmon.
- Snack on nuts and seeds.
- Add avocado to salads and sandwiches.



Developed in conjunction with Kate Fleming, Dietician

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