

Fat or Fiction



It appears that Americans have become almost fat “phobic”. Wherever we look, it’s fat-free this or fat-free that. It is somewhat unfortunate that the message of lowering ones fat intake has been so misconstrued. Fat is a very important part of our diet. The newest guidelines issued by the Institute of Medicine, have actually increased total fat consumption up to 35% of total calories, if the fat is a healthy fat. In addition, more and more research is showing that perhaps fat isn’t always the bad guy. However, there does need to be a limit, as all things in excess, can be problematic.

Why is Fat Important?

- ✓ It provides us with essential fatty acids, which are the building blocks to fat.
- ✓ It helps promote satiety keeping you feeling full, so that you are not hungry all the time.
- ✓ It helps transport fat-soluble vitamins.
- ✓ It provides cells with some of the nutrients needed to grow, reproduce, and to protect you from disease.
- ✓ It helps the skin, eyes and the brain.
- ✓ It makes food taste good!

Types of Fat

There are several different types of fats. The type of fat is important due to its impact on cholesterol (CHL) in the bloodstream.

Type of Fat	Common Sources	Effect on Total CHL	Effect on LDL (Bad CHL)	Effect on HDL (Good CHL)
Saturated	Plant sources: Palm kernel oil, cocoa butter, palm oil, and coconut oil. Animal sources: Beef fat, pork fat, chicken fat, cheese, ice cream, yogurt, and butter.	↑	↑	---
Hydrogenated or Trans Unsaturated Fats¹	Shortenings, margarine, dressings, cake, cookies, bread, crackers, french fries, and potato chips.	↑	↑	---
Polyunsaturated Omega-3 Fatty Acid (Linolenic Acid)	Plant Sources: Canola oil, soybean oil. Animal Sources: Fish oils such as Salmon, halibut, tuna, and sardines.	↓	↓	↓
Polyunsaturated Omega-6 Fatty Acid (Linoleic Acid)	Plant Sources: Safflower oil, sesame oil, soybean oil, corn oil, linseed oil, cottonseed oil, sunflower seed oil, peanut oil, sunflower seed oil, and sesame seed oil.	↓	↓	↓
Monounsaturated	Plant sources: Olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil, rice bran oil, and avocados.	↓	↓	---

¹ Hydrogenated fats are those fats created in the process of converting a liquid oil to a semi-solid or solid (in this process “trans” fats are created). Such is the case with many processed foods and foods like Crisco oil and margarine.

Fat or Fiction (continued)

As you can see, different types of fat affect CHL differently. Saturated fats increase your cholesterol level about twice as much as polyunsaturated fats lower cholesterol; so your choice of fat intake can impact your health either positively or negatively.

What is the difference between “good” and “bad” cholesterol?

Cholesterol is not a nutrient, does not provide calories and can be produced by the body. We don't need to take in any cholesterol. Cholesterol is only found in animal products. LDL (low density lipoprotein) cholesterol, or the “bad” cholesterol, is the type of cholesterol that causes “plaque” to form in blood vessels and is made by the body. High LDL cholesterol is the single most important contributor to increasing your risk of developing coronary heart disease. HDL (high density lipoprotein) cholesterol, or the “good” cholesterol, is the type of cholesterol that picks up the “bad” cholesterol in your blood stream and carries it back to your liver. LDL and HDL are used when taking about blood values and lipid profiles but not used when referring to dietary cholesterol.

How is cholesterol different from fat?

Sometimes there is confusion between fat and cholesterol and “good” and “bad” cholesterol. Fat is a nutrient and provides calories. When you eat fat your liver uses it to make “packages” to deliver fat-soluble vitamins and fatty acids to your cells for energy and nutrients. This “package” includes LDL cholesterol, fats, and fat-soluble vitamins. Once the “package” has entered the cell, most of the LDL is deconstructed inside the cell, and safely removed from your body. However, some of the LDL may be released into your blood stream where it floats around freely. LDL cholesterol that floats around in your blood is usually picked up by the HDL and carried back to your liver to be “re-packaged”, and used to deliver more nutrients to your cells. However, excess LDL cannot always be picked up by HDL and therefore may lodge in your arteries, causing greater plaque build-up.

But how much fat is too much fat?

Although a little fat is fine and some of the healthier fats can even be eaten in larger amounts, too much fat can contribute to several chronic diseases including coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes type 2, cancer, and obesity. On the other hand, too little fat will not provide your cells with the fat-soluble nutrients and energy needed to function properly.

Remember your fat gram budget is based on a percentage of total calories with a healthy range between 20-35%, which would be somewhere in the range of 40-70 grams. If you eat more than 2000 calories, than your total fat budget is simply based on the percentage of the higher calorie intake.

The chart below shows the number of daily fat grams for a given percent of total calories based on your daily calorie level.

Daily Calorie Level	Fat % 30	Fat % 25	Fat % 20
1200	40 g	33 g	27 g
1500	50 g	42 g	33 g
1800	60 g	50 g	40 g
2000	67 g	56 g	44 g