

Dietary Fats and Your Health

Why is fat important?

Everyone needs to eat some fat to stay healthy. Dietary fats give you energy and help you absorb vitamins from foods, such as Vitamins A, D, E, and K.

How much fat is enough?

The amount of fat you should have every day depends on your age, gender, and how active you are. Generally, men should aim for about 65 grams of fat every day, while women should aim for about 50 grams. This usually means choosing foods that are low in fat, and adding no more than three to six teaspoons of fat (15-30 grams) to foods each day.

What if I eat too much fat?

Eating some fat is good for your health. However, eating high fat foods too often can result in excessive weight gain because fats are very high in calories. Being overweight can increase your risk of developing diabetes. For more information on diabetes see BC HealthFile [#70 Diabetes: Getting Started](#).

Too much fat can also lead to other health problems such as heart disease and cancer. For more information on heart healthy eating see BC HealthFile [#68a Heart Healthy Eating](#).

Healthy fat choices

Fats are not all the same. Some fats are good for your health, while others are not.

Good choices are *monounsaturated* fats, which help to lower blood cholesterol levels. Monounsaturated fats are found mainly in olive and canola oils and foods containing these ingredients, and in nuts and avocado.

Polyunsaturated fats also help to lower blood cholesterol levels. Two special polyunsaturated fats – omega 3 and omega 6 – are very important for your health. Omega 3 fats are found in fish, flax seeds, walnuts and canola oil. Good sources of omega 6 fats are seeds, safflower, sunflower, corn, and soybean oils, and foods that contain these ingredients.

Saturated and *trans* fats are poor choices mainly because they can increase blood cholesterol levels. It is very important to eat less saturated and trans fats.

Saturated fats are mostly found in animal products, especially fatty meats like sausages and bacon, and products with high amounts of dairy fat like butter, whipping cream, sour cream, cream cheese and chip dips.

Trans fats come mostly from vegetable oils that have been made solid through hydrogenation. Examples of foods that contain trans fats are hard margarine, shortening, donuts, Danish pastries, cookies, crackers, chips, and many fast foods.

Make your fats count for good nutrition!

Some high fat foods, like chips or cookies, give you very little nutrition with the fat. Nuts and seeds, avocado, salmon and sardines, and cheese are also high fat foods; however, they provide important nutrients as well. So choose the fats you do eat wisely.

Healthy eating tips

Tips for meals at home

- Use less margarine, butter and oil. Every teaspoon has about 5 grams of fat, and they add up quickly!
- Use mustard, ketchup, relish, and cranberry sauce instead of butter, margarine or mayonnaise.
- Buy fat reduced salad dressings.
- Make your own salad dressings, sauces, or dips with yogurt or light mayonnaise, or a small amount of oil with flavourful ingredients like balsamic vinegar, garlic and herbs.
- Experiment with lower fat desserts – a piece of pie or cheesecake can have up to 20 grams of fat! Substitute with homemade fruit crisp (5 grams/half cup) or sherbet (2 grams/half cup).
- Buy skim or 1% milk – 1 cup of whole milk contains 8 grams of fat while 1 cup of 1% milk has only 3 grams. If you're used to whole milk, change slowly by switching to 2% milk first.

Snacking tips

- Try a low fat yogurt (3 grams fat) or a low fat homemade banana muffin (5 grams fat).
- Read labels and choose crackers that have less than 3 grams of fat per serving.
- Snacks that have almost no fat include fresh fruit, air popped popcorn and pretzels. High fat snacks such as a donut or a handful of potato chips can have up to 18 grams of fat.

Tips for eating out

- Choose foods that have been grilled, roasted, poached, or barbequed, rather than deep-fried.
- Ask for menu substitutions – a baked potato with a teaspoon of butter or margarine has 5 grams of fat, while a large order of French fries can have over 20 grams of fat.
- Try sharing dessert with a friend and cut the fat in half!

Use the information on food labels

Look for the claims

- Low fat – means that the food must have less than 3 grams of fat per serving.
- Fat free – means that the food must have less than 0.5 grams of fat per serving.

For more information on the amount of fat in foods, see Health Canada's [Nutrient Value of Some Common Foods](#) at www.hc-sc.gc.ca.

For more nutrition information, call **Dial-A-Dietitian** at 604-732-9191 or 1-800-667-3438 to speak to a registered dietitian

For more BC HealthFile topics visit www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm, or visit your local public health unit.

Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
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- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

Visit BC HealthGuide OnLine – a world of health information you can trust at www.bchealthguide.org

Food Labels and Nutrition Information

Serving Size – Always check the serving size and compare to the amount you are eating.

Fat – Remember that foods labeled *low fat* have less than 3 grams of fat per serving.

Saturated and trans fats – Keep these low so your daily intake is less than 20 grams for both saturated and trans fats combined.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 10 crackers (g)	% DV
Calories 110	
Fat 6 g	9%
Saturated fats 1.5 g + Trans 2.0 g	13%
Cholesterol 0 mg	0%
Sodium 190 mg	8%
Carbohydrate 11 g	4%
Fibre 0 g	0%
Sugars 3 g	
Protein 3 g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 3%
Calcium 0%	Iron 4%

% DV (Daily Value) for fat helps you understand how much fat is in food compared to the average amount recommended each day. The DV for fat is 65 grams.

A food low in saturated and trans fats will have a DV of less than 10%

