



Confused by ... fat

Knowing your good fats from your bad fats is an important part of maintaining a healthy, balanced diet. **Linia Patel**, from the British Dietetic Association, explains

Do you know your "good" fats from your "bad" fats? Or how much of the "good" fats you should be eating each day? No? Well, fear not you are not alone. Recent research conducted by an independent advisory board revealed that 97% of people are confused about which type of fat they should (or shouldn't) be eating. Clearly, it's time for some guidance; read on for your essential guide on fats.

The fact is: we all need fats. Fats allow the body to absorb vitamins, maintain healthy skin

and vision and boost immune function. 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 others increase our risks of heart disease. The key is therefore to eat the right types of fats.

Good Fats

When choosing fats, your best options are unsaturated fats: monounsaturated (MUFAs) and

polyunsaturated fats (PUFAs). These fats, if used in place of others, can lower your risk of heart disease by reducing the total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels (the bad cholesterol) in your blood while increasing high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol (the good cholesterol). Nuts including walnuts, almonds and peanuts, avocado, olive oil and canola oil are all high in MUFAs.

One type of polyunsaturated fat, omega-3 fatty acids may be especially beneficial to your heart. Omega-3 appears to decrease the risk of coronary heart disease. They may also protect against irregular heartbeat and help lower blood pressure levels. Oily fish (such as salmon, mackerel and herring), flaxseeds, flax oil and walnuts are all high in omega-3.

Bad fats

Saturated and trans fats are less healthy kinds of fats. These fats can increase your risk of heart disease by raising your total and LDL (bad) cholesterol. Saturated fats are found mainly in animal products such as meat, dairy, seafood and eggs. However, some plant foods like coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oil are also high in saturated fat. Trans fats are found in partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, commercial baked goods (such as biscuits, cakes and pastries), fried foods and hard margarine.

Getting the right amounts

Current government guidelines recommend that women eat approximately 70g of fat each day and men around 95g, going by the standard 2000 calorie and 2500 calorie diet. According to a national survey, on average, both men and women are eating close to these amounts on a daily basis. Where things go wrong however, is that most of us are eating too

much of the wrong types of fats. In the UK, about 13% of people's energy intake currently comes from saturated fats, when the recommended intake is no more than 11%. Practically,

11% equates to eating less than 20g of saturated fat for women on a daily basis and 30g a day for men.

It's not hard to reach your limit for saturated fat. A typical 40g portion of cheddar cheese contains about 8 to 9g saturated fat; if you tuck into a couple of sausages you could be eating about 10g. A Bounty bar has a whopping 17.3g of saturated fat.

You don't need to start recording the amount of fat in every single food you eat, but it's a good idea to look out on food labels for foods that contain a lot of saturated fat. That way you can start to recognise what these are and try to cut down on them. Use this simple label guide to help you keep your saturated fat in check:

- + **High: more than 5g saturates per 100g**
- + **Low: 1.5g saturates or less per 100g**

It is important to remember that all fats, including the "good" fats are high in calories. (9kcal per g of fat) So moderation is key. Yes, occasional treats are fine but nutrition experts recommend that you consume the "good" fats in place of the "bad" fats not in addition to them!

Although there is currently no recommended daily allowance for omega-3 fatty acids in the UK, guidelines advise people to eat approximately 2-3g of omega-3 fatty acids per week. For the general population including 1-2 portions of oily fish (a portion is

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Ten Top Fat Tips:

1 Watch your portions. If you're a fan of bacon butties for breakfast, have one fewer rasher in your sandwich; if you're a cheese lover, grate it to make it go further; and when you do fancy a biscuit, chocolate or some crisps, opt for the snack size.

2 Switch to skinny lattes. Cut saturated fat and save on calories.

3 Have an omega-3 pot. Make up a breakfast sprinkle of nuts and seeds (walnuts, almonds, pumpkin, sunflower and flax seeds). Boost your omega-3 intake by having 1 tablespoon on your cereal/breakfast each morning.

4 Snack wisely. If you've got the munchies, snack on fruit, have a small handful of nuts instead of eating cakes and biscuits.

5 Have a fishy day. Swap your weekend fry up for a smoked mackerel breakfast. Prepare fish such as salmon instead of meat one or two times a week.

6 Swap mayo for avocado. Slice or mash avocado and add to salads or sandwiches instead of mayonnaise.

7 Go grilled, stir-fried or steamed. These low fat cooking methods will help you cut down drastically on fat intake.

8 Buy lean. Go for leaner cuts of meat or buy lean meats like turkey.

9 Become a tomato fan. Choose tomato-based sauces over creamy or cheesy ones in pasta dishes and

