

Dietary Fats: What is the Difference?

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Your body needs fat to function properly. Dietary fat carries fat-soluble vitamins — vitamins A, D, E and K — from your food into your body. Fat also helps maintain healthy hair and skin, protects vital organs, keeps your body insulated, and provides a sense of fullness after meals. But some fats are also harmful. It's not necessary that you completely eliminate all fats from your meals. Rather, choose the healthier types of fats and enjoy them in moderation.

Healthy Fats

These fats, if used in place of others, can lower your risk of heart disease by reducing the total and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels in your blood.

These are healthier fats as well as the best food sources:

- Monounsaturated fat remains liquid at room temperature but may start to solidify in the refrigerator. Foods high in monounsaturated fat include olive, peanut and canola oils, avocados and most nuts.
- Polyunsaturated fat is usually liquid at room temperature and in the refrigerator. Foods high in polyunsaturated fats include vegetable oils, such as corn, sunflower, safflower, soy and cottonseed oils.
- Omega-3 fatty acids are polyunsaturated fats found mostly in seafood. Good sources of Omega-3 include salmon, mackerel and herring. Flax oil and walnuts also contain Omega-3 fatty acids.

Harmful fats

These can increase your risk of heart disease by increasing your total and LDL ("bad") cholesterol.

These are harmful fats and common food sources:

- Saturated fat. Usually solid or waxy at room temperature, saturated fat is most often found in animal products — such as red meat, poultry, butter and whole milk. Some come from plant sources: e.g. palm and coconut.
- Trans fat. This comes from adding hydrogen to vegetable oil through a process called hydrogenation. Hydrogenated fat is a common ingredient in commercial baked goods, shortening and in fried foods, such as doughnuts and french fries.
- Dietary cholesterol. Your body makes all of the cholesterol it needs, but you also get it from animal products, such as meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy products, lard and butter.

Type of fat	Recommendation
Fats	Less than 35 percent of your total daily calories
Dietary cholesterol	Less than 300 milligrams a day
USDA and DHHS recommendations for healthy adults	

Tips for choosing the best types of fat

Consider these tips when making your fat choices:

- Sauté with olive oil instead of butter.
- Use olive oil instead of vegetable oil in salad dressings and marinades.
- Snack on a small handful of nuts rather than potato chips or processed crackers.
- Add slices of avocado, rather than cheese, to your sandwich.
- Prepare fish such as salmon and mackerel, which contain monounsaturated and Omega-3 fats, instead of meat one or two times a week.