

# Family Friendly Factsheets!

## Types of Fat



Fat is an essential part of a healthy diet and is important for the growth and development of children. It is used by the body for the absorption of certain vitamins and certain types of fat are also thought to have a positive impact on the heart and the immune system. However, fat is high in calories and so should form a small part of the diet. Also, there are different types of fat which should be eaten in varying amounts in order to provide valuable nutrients to the body for healthy development. Below is some information about the different kinds of fats, their roles in the body and how much of them our bodies need.

### Cholesterol

There are two types of cholesterol in the body, HDL cholesterol, or 'good' cholesterol and LDL cholesterol, or 'bad' cholesterol. LDL cholesterol can start to build up in the walls of the arteries, which increases the risk of heart attack, stroke and heart disease. Contrary to popular belief the amount of cholesterol in our diet has very little impact on how much cholesterol we have circulating in our bodies. In fact the best way to control cholesterol is with a balanced diet low in saturated and trans fats, and with moderate levels of unsaturated fats.

### Saturated fat

Saturated fat is often recognised as 'bad' fat, as a high intake is associated with high cholesterol levels which can lead to heart disease. The term 'saturated' relates to the chemical structure of the fat, meaning that usually, saturated fat is solid at room temperature such as that found in butter, meat and cheese. Any products containing saturated fat will list the amount present in the nutrition panel of the packaging. Although a small amount of saturated fat is needed by the body, an excess can lead to weight gain, high cholesterol and high blood pressure and should be substituted for unsaturated fat where possible.

### Trans Fats and Hydrogenated Fats

Trans fats and hydrogenated fats are created when unsaturated fats such as oils, undergo a process known as hydrogenation. This process alters the structure of the fat, making it harder for the body to digest. As there are no specific labeling rules for trans and hydrogenated fats, the best way to find out if a product contains these types of fat is to check the ingredients list for hydrogenated or

partially hydrogenated fats and shortenings. Remember, the higher up the list the ingredient appears, the more the product contains. Trans and hydrogenated fats seem to have a similar effect on the body as saturated fats, increasing bad cholesterol, lowering good cholesterol and leading to weight gain. Although small amounts of trans fats occur naturally and are found in trace levels in animal products, the largest source of trans fats comes from processed foods such as cakes, biscuits, crisps and fast foods. As with saturated fats, trans fats should be replaced with unsaturated fats when possible.

### Unsaturated fat

Unsaturated fats are split into two groups; monounsaturated and polyunsaturated with the names again referring to the structure of the fat. Although polyunsaturated is thought to be slightly more effective, both types have been shown to lower cholesterol. Monounsaturated fats are found in foods such as olives, olive oil, almonds, peanuts, avocados and hazelnuts and polyunsaturated fats are found in foods including oily fish, walnut oil, sunflower oil and sesame oil. Although unsaturated fat has a positive impact on heart health, it contains a high level of calories meaning that an excessive intake could lead to weight gain.

### Omega 3 and 6

Omega 3 and 6 fats are types of polyunsaturated fats, which have featured in the media recently and are reported to have many beneficial effects on the body. Omega 3 fats such as those found in oily fish, are thought to have anti inflammatory properties, reduce cholesterol and have been reported to help with concentration and learning, although the evidence for this claim is not considered sufficient. Omega 6 oils are found in nuts, seeds and their oils and have been shown to lower cholesterol, benefit the skin and also have anti inflammatory properties. The ideal balance for omega 3 to omega 6 is 4:1, with oily fish being the best source of long chain omega 3 fats. The FSA recommend that boys can eat up to 4 portions of oily fish per week and girls 2.

See the Phunky Foods Top Tips and Activities for some ideas on cutting down the amount of fat in your daily diet.