

Choosing Heart-Healthy Fats



Eating some fat at your meals and snacks is actually healthy. Fat helps your body absorb certain nutrients. It adds flavor and texture to the foods you eat, and it helps you feel satisfied after a meal. It is important to understand which fats are healthiest, so you can make the best choices.

Which Fats Are Healthy Fats?

Some types of fat are healthier for you (and your heart) than other types. Choose these types of fat more often:

- **Monounsaturated** and **polyunsaturated fats**: these fats can help lower your total cholesterol and your LDL (“bad”) cholesterol.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids**: these help improve your heart health by reducing plaque build-up in the arteries and decreasing triglycerides (unhealthy fats) in the blood.

Examples of Healthy Fats

Monounsaturated fat	Polyunsaturated fat	Omega-3 Fatty Acids
• Olive oil	• Soybean oil (often called “vegetable oil”)	• Fatty or oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, sardines, herring
• Peanut oil	• Corn oil	• Walnuts
• Canola oil	• Safflower oil	• Ground flax seed
• Avocados	• Soft tub margarines	• Flaxseed oil
• Nuts and seeds	• Walnuts	
• Peanut butter	• Flax seed	
	• Sunflower seeds	

Which Fats Are Unhealthy Fats?

Eating **saturated** and **trans fats** increases your total cholesterol and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. These fats also raise your risk for heart disease. Choose these types of fats less often.

- Replace saturated fats with healthier types of fats whenever possible. For example, cook or bake with olive oil or canola oil.
- Aim to avoid *trans* fats. If **hydrogenated** or **partially hydrogenated oil** is listed as an ingredient, the food contains *trans* fat.

- **Note:** If you like a food that has *trans* fat, read food labels for similar products. Some may be made without unhealthy fats.

Sources of Unhealthy Fats

Saturated Fat

- Meat
- Poultry with skin
- Coconut oil
- Palm oil and other tropical oils
- High-fat dairy products, such as whole or 2% milk, cream, butter, and ice cream

Trans fat

- Stick margarine
- Chips and crackers
- Cookies
- Doughnuts
- Pastries
- French fries

What About Dietary Cholesterol?

Meat, dairy foods, seafood, butter, eggs, and other animal products contain cholesterol. Eating foods with cholesterol can increase your body's cholesterol levels, although not as much as saturated and *trans* fats.

Cholesterol is found in many of the same foods that have saturated fat. Therefore, if you limit foods with saturated fat, you will eat less cholesterol, too.

Meal Planning Tips

The following tips can help you choose healthy fats over unhealthy fats. They will help you limit the amount of dietary cholesterol you eat, too.

- Cook or bake with heart-healthy oils, such as olive oil or canola oil.
- Enjoy a 1-ounce serving of nuts as a snack.
- Add ground flax seed and berries to yogurt for a quick and easy breakfast.
- Have a slice of avocado on your sandwich instead of mayonnaise or butter.
- Remove the skin from chicken and turkey.
- Choose lean cuts of meat. For beef, try top round or sirloin steak. For pork, try top loin chop or tenderloin.
- Eat a seafood meal at least twice each week.

