

## The Skinny on Fats

Fat has a bad reputation, but everyone needs to consume some fat to maintain healthy brain, nerve, cardiovascular, and immune system function. The problem is, most kids, teens, and adults eat too much saturated and *trans* fats instead of heart-healthy unsaturated fats.

As a parent, you can help your child cut back on unhealthy fats. It is also critical to educate your children on the difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ fats so that they have the tools to make healthy dietary decisions when you aren’t around.

### Unsaturated: The Good Fats

The American Heart Association recommends that Americans between the ages of 4 and 18 consume about 25-35% of their daily calories from fats. Most of these calories should come from mono or polyunsaturated fats.

Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats come from fish and plant sources and generally remain liquid at room temperature. Food containing unsaturated fats include:

- Olives and olive oil
- Most nuts including almonds, cashews, and peanuts
- Seeds like sesame, pumpkin, and sunflower
- Avocados
- Corn, canola, soybean, safflower, sunflower, and cottonseed oils

Omega-3 Fatty Acids are a particular type of polyunsaturated fat. The consumption of 2 servings—about 8 ounces—per week of fish high in omega-3 fatty acids is associated with a reduced risk of coronary artery disease in adults.<sup>i</sup> Fish that naturally contain more oil (like salmon, trout, herring) are higher in omega-3’s than lean fish (like cod, haddock, catfish).

Note: It is important to be careful when serving fish because some varieties—like shark, swordfish, tilefish, or king mackerel—contain higher levels of mercury. Young children should eat fish that are lower in mercury. For more information on mercury in fish, visit

[www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admehg3.html](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admehg3.html)

### Saturated and *trans*: The Bad Fats

Everyone, adults and children alike, should limit intake of saturated and *trans* fats. The American Heart Association recommends that less than 7% of calories come from saturated fat and less than 1% calories come from *trans* fat per day.<sup>ii</sup>

In general, saturated and *trans* fats and cholesterol increase LDL cholesterol. Increased LDL “bad” cholesterol raises a person’s risk for heart disease.<sup>iii</sup>



Unfortunately, saturated fats are in many of our favorite foods, including:

- Whole milk, cream, yogurt, cheese, sour cream, and ice cream
- Cooking fats like butter, lard, suet, and bacon drippings
- Some meats like beef, pork, veal, sausage, bacon
- Skin from chicken and turkey
- Chocolate and cocoa butter
- Palm oil and coconut products<sup>iv</sup>

Restaurant and store-bought items are the most common sources of *trans* fat, including:

- Packaged snacks like chips, microwave popcorn, candy and crackers
- Bakery items like breads, cookies, cakes and brownies
- Margarine and vegetable shortening
- Deep fried items like chicken nuggets, taco shells, fish sticks, doughnuts and french fries<sup>v</sup>

The FDA now requires manufacturers of packaged foods to list the amount of *trans* fat on a food's nutrition facts panel and many producers have eliminated these fats from their products. However, in most areas, this does not apply to restaurant and fast food dining.

To minimize your family's risk of consuming "bad" fats, read labels on packaged foods and buy products with the least trans and saturated fat possible. At restaurants, try to choose foods that are baked, broiled, or grilled rather than fried.

## Put your new knowledge to practice!

There are a number of steps you can take to replace the bad fats in your diet with the more heart-friendly variety. Here are just a few:

1. **In the kitchen?**

Instead of cooking with butter, margarine, or vegetable shortening, switch to olive, canola, sunflower, corn, soybean, or safflower oil.

2. **For family night out...**

Encourage your family to make healthier choices at the restaurant. Skip the butter or cheese sauce, choose broth-based instead of creamy soups, and avoid fried or sautéed foods. Request that vegetables be steamed, and order the side salad instead of the fries.

3. **Spreads and sauces**

Substitute avocados for butter and creamy dressing in your family's diet by adding slices to your favorite sandwiches and salads, or make fresh homemade guacamole and serve with fresh veggies for dipping.

4. **Fish night**

Serve salmon or tuna for dinner at least once a week.

5. **On the go?**

When you head out for fast food, try to choose healthy side items like fruit or vegetable over fries or onion rings.

6. **Got Milk?**

Buy fat-free or 1% milk instead of the higher-fat varieties for the fridge.

7. **Dairy Days**

Switch to low-fat or fat-free ice cream, yogurt, sour cream, and cottage cheese.

8. **Pizza night...**

Try increasing the veggies on your pizza and backing off the high fat meats such as pepperoni and sausage. Canadian bacon is a flavorful compromise if you want the flavor of meat without all the saturated fat.

9. **Making chicken?**

Buy lean, boneless, skinless chicken and turkey breast for use in your favorite recipes or remove the skin of whole chicken or turkey prior to serving.

10. **Go lean**

Try cooking everything from burgers to meatloaf with 93% lean ground beef, chicken, or turkey or when browning higher fat meats, try straining and rinsing the meat in hot water after cooking in order to wash off some of the excess fat.

With just a few slight dietary modifications, you'll be making great strides towards lifelong heart health!

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<sup>i,2</sup> Dietary Recommendations for Children and Adolescents

A Guide for Practitioners: Consensus Statement From the American Heart Association (*Circulation*. 2005;112:2061-2075.

<sup>iii,5</sup> <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4776>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4582>