

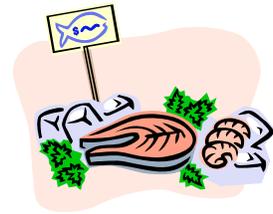
Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

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The Good and Bad about Fats

By Mindy Bell, BS



The recent ban on trans fat in New York restaurants has many consumers thinking about the types of fat in their diet. While fats do have their place in a healthy diet, some types are better for us than others, and all should be eaten in moderation. While the spotlight is on trans fat for now, let's take a moment to learn more about the many types of fat in the foods we eat, and how to find them.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends a moderate total fat intake, accounting for 20% to 35% of total daily calories. This amount provides the essential fat our body needs, while helping to keep calories in check.

Most of this fat should come from **monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat sources.**

These “healthier” fats are commonly found in oils from plants and fish, and can help keep our heart and blood vessels healthy when they replace saturated fat in the diet.



The Dietary Guidelines also recommends limiting **saturated fat** to less than 10% of total calories for the general population, or about 20 grams per day for a 1,800-calorie meal plan. Saturated fat is less heart-healthy than the mono- or polyunsaturated fats because it can raise blood cholesterol levels and contribute to clogging of blood vessels. Saturated fats are typically found in animal products, such as butter, full-fat milk products, and fatty meats such as bacon and regular ground beef.

As for **trans fat**, you may wonder as many people do, what exactly is trans fat, and why is it getting so much publicity? Trans fat is made by a process called hydrogenation, whereby liquid oils are made more solid. This process makes oils more stable, extends shelf life, and improves taste and texture qualities for foods that contain these oils.

Many processed foods, such as baked goods and fried snacks, are sources of trans fat, along with margarine and shortening.



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Small amounts of trans fat are found naturally in some animal products as well.

Advice regarding intake of trans fat is less clear cut than the other fats. In general, it is recommended that you eat as little trans fat as possible, since a Daily Value has not been established for food labeling. In addition, the American Heart Association recommends limiting trans fat to less than 1% of total calories, which would mean no more than 2 grams per day for a 1,800-calorie meal plan.

Trans fat should be limited in the diet for good reason. Not only can it raise LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels, it can also lower HDL (“good”) cholesterol. While most people tend to eat far more saturated fat than trans fat, it is still a good idea to look for both on food labels and avoid eating too much of either type. Many food manufacturers are working to eliminate trans fat in their products.

Reading the nutrition labels on food packages is an easy way to find out how much fat is in the foods you eat. Try to choose foods with less saturated fat and trans fat, and limit dietary cholesterol to less than 300

milligrams per day to help keep your heart healthy. A good rule of thumb from the FDA for saturated fat and cholesterol is: less than 5% of the Daily Value is considered low, while greater than 20% of the Daily Value is high. You can still enjoy your favorite treats, as long as you balance them with nutritious foods that contain little fat and cholesterol at other times during the day.



To learn more about the different types of fat and what foods they are found in, check out these resources:

2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans at:

<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/html/chapter6.htm#table11>

Food and Drug Administration at:

http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2003/503_fats.html

The American Heart Association at:

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=532>

