



## Fat Facts

With all the attention on fat today you may be surprised to find that Fat isn't as evil as we may think. Instead, it is a very important nutrient which performs a whole range of functions and we can't actually live without it. Fat acts as a partner in our bodies and helps to transport vitamins for example vitamins A, D, E, and K. These vitamins have many roles including helping to absorb calcium into our bones and teeth, maintaining healthy skin and hair and helping to protect our bodies against diseases such as certain cancers and coronary heart disease. Fat provide us with a very good source of energy supplying 9 kcals/g and this is essential for keeping our body processes going. Our bodies also use fat as an extra energy source in the form of adipose tissue which it can call on for energy when we need it. Finally, body fat also serves to protect and cushion our vital organs and helps to insulate our body against heat loss. The issues with fat tend to be around the amount and types of fat we consume Currently we recommend that our fat intake is about 1/3 of our total kcals, that is approx 75g/day for a women consuming 2000kcals/day and 95g/day for a male consuming 2500/kcals/day.

### What type of fat?

Fat can be divided into 2 main types, saturated and unsaturated.

**Saturated Fats** These tend to be solid at room temperature, increase blood cholesterol and should be limited. They are found in butter, hard margarines, lard, cheese, cream, meat fat and confectionary. Most saturated fats tend to be of animal origin. However, the presence of "hydrogenated vegetable oil" on labels indicates the presence of saturated fats. Look out for the word 'hydrogenated' on food labels in cakes, biscuits, crisps, savoury snacks, chocolates and toffees.

**Unsaturated Fats** These tend to be liquid at room temperature and include polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. These fats are less harmful to our bodies than Saturated fats and are found in most vegetable oils for example sunflower oil, olive oils and rapeseed oil. If buying margarine spreads check that they contain mainly the aforementioned oils. Oily fish for example salmon, fresh tuna, mackerel and herring are also excellent sources of these oils. Both saturated and unsaturated



fat have the same number of calories. Nevertheless, the type of fat you eat can keep the fats in your blood healthy, and unsaturated fats can improve blood fat levels.

## **Common myths about Fat !**

### **1. A low fat diet is very healthy.**

False, Fat is an essential part of our diet and we need to aim for approx 30% of our total calories coming from fat. Remember to choose more from the healthier fat groups

### **2. Olive oil or sunflower oil has lower calories and fat than butter.**

False Olive oil and sunflower oil are actually higher in fat and calories than butter but remember they are a healthier type of fat.

### **3. Low fat means low calorie**

No not necessarily. Fat is a concentrated source of calories and also adds great palatability to a food so often by reducing it manufacturers increase sugar content to get an acceptable product. Check energy content on both labels before deciding.

### **4. Is there a difference between fat and cholesterol?**

Yes there is. Cholesterol is a fat like substance found only in animal products like meat, dairy, shellfish, butter, etc. but it is not a fat. The most important determinant of blood cholesterol is saturated fat.

## **How do I reduce my fat intake?**

1. Choose low fat dairy products e.g. low fat milk, yogurts, cheese.
2. Avoid fried foods and grill, steam, bake, barbecue or microwave instead of frying.
3. Switch to low fat polyunsaturated or monounsaturated spreads instead of margarines or butter.
4. Eat lean meat 3 times a week and poultry twice a week without the skin.
5. Include more fish in your diet particularly oily fish
6. Try tomatoes based sauces rather than high fat cream/cheese sauces.
7. Keep pastries, cakes and other desserts to a minimum choose fresh fruit instead.
8. Eat plenty fruit and vegetables – 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables are recommended daily. Do not be tempted to add butter or mayonnaise

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