

## THE SKINNY ON FAT: GOOD FAT VS. BAD FAT

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The USDA's Food Guide Pyramid places fats and oils at the top of the list of foods to avoid, yet if one looks at the current research on the topic of fat and the risk of disease, the USDA guidelines are simplistic and incomplete in their advice as to how to eat healthily. The truth is that not all fats are created equal. In fact, there are some fats that not only should be included in a healthy lifestyle program, but also that aid tremendously in weight management.

### What are the different types of fat?

Type of Fat	Main Sources	State at room temperature	Effect on cholesterol compared with carbohydrates
Monounsaturated	Olives and olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil; cashews, almonds, peanuts, and most other nuts; peanut butter; avocados	Liquid	Lowers LDL; raises HDL
Polyunsaturated	Corn, soybean, safflower, and cottonseed oils; fish	Liquid	Lowers LDL; raises HDL
Saturated	Whole milk, butter, cheese, and ice cream; red meat; chocolate; coconuts, coconut milk, and coconut oil	Solid	Raises both LDL and HDL
Trans fatty acids	Most margarines; vegetable shortening; partially hydrogenated vegetable oil; deep fried chips; many fast foods; most commercial baked goods	Solid or semi-solid	Raises LDL*

\* Compared to monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fat, trans fat increases LDL, decreases HDL, and increases triglycerides. Taken from *Eat, Drink and Be Healthy* by Walter C. Willett, M.D.

### Why is fat important?

- Fat is a major energy source for cells.
- Fat protects vital organs and provides insulation.
- Fat provides joint lubrication.
- Fat is necessary for hormone production.

### **Benefits of unsaturated fats vs. saturated fats**

Eating unsaturated fats instead of saturated fats or carbohydrates has many benefits including:

- Lowers levels LDL (“bad” cholesterol), without lowering levels of HDL (“good cholesterol)
- Prevents the increase in triglycerides, another form of fat circulating in the bloodstream that has been linked with heart disease, that occurs with high-carbohydrate diets
- Reduces the development of erratic heartbeats, a main cause of sudden cardiac death
- Reduces the tendency for blood-flow blocking clots to form in arteries

### **What are essential fatty acids (EFAs) and why are they important?**

Essential fatty acids, also known as the omega-3 fatty acids are essential fats that your body does not produce, but must be obtained from food sources such as fish, flax seeds (linseed), walnuts, as well as canola and un-hydrogenated soybean oil. They are important for many reasons including:

- EF’s are an important component of cell membranes, especially in the eye, brain and sperm cells.
- EFAs are the building blocks of some hormones, including those that regulate blood clotting, contraction and relaxation of artery walls, and inflammation.
- EFAs are beneficial in the prevention and treatment of heart disease, stroke and autoimmune disorders such as lupus, eczema, and rheumatoid arthritis

### **How can fats aid in weight management?**

When most people go on low-fat diets they will instinctively replace the fats they would normally eat with carbohydrates. The problem is that carbohydrates will increase your weight as much as fat does if you consume more calories than you burn off. In addition, carbohydrate consumption—especially the “simple” ones like white rice, white bread, potatoes and refined sugar—will also cause dramatic spikes in blood sugar levels which is a contributing factor to type-2 diabetes. However, if you replace saturated and trans fats with unsaturated fats, and keep your caloric intake steady you won’t gain weight. Furthermore, if you add regular exercise to this regimen, you will actually lose weight.