

Fats

What are Fats?

Fats are required by our bodies and play a crucial role in our overall health. Fats promote healthy intestinal cell lining, cell membrane function and structure, brain health, eye health and nervous system function. The myelin sheath (which insulates our nerve cells) is 80% fat! We also need fat for hormone production, formation of Vitamin D, nerve transmission and many other important roles. Fats also provide us with essential fat-soluble nutrients, keep us feeling full between meals and help stabilize our blood glucose levels.

Choosing Fats

Choose high quality, whole food fats as much as possible, and limit your intake of highly processed fats and oils.

Whole Food Fats (choose more often)

- Raw nuts and seeds
- Natural nut butters with no added sugar or oils
- Avocado
- Olives
- Tahini
- Cold pressed oils – olive oil, avocado oil
- Grass-fed butter and ghee (small amounts)
- Coconut oil (small amounts)

Highly Processed Fats (limit or avoid)

- Margarine, buttery spreads
- Shortening
- Vegetable, soybean, corn, cottonseed, canola and palm oil
- Fat in highly processed foods and fried foods

Fats Worthy of Special Attention

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are essential fats that play a major role in brain and eye health, cardiovascular function, immune system function and many other benefits. The three major omega-3 fats are:

- **ALA** (alpha-linolenic acid)
- **EPA** (eicosapentaenoic acid)
- **DHA** (docosahexaenoic acid)

EPA and DHA are the most used forms by our body. We can convert ALA to EPA and DHA, but at a very small percentage and sometimes not at all. Most plant-based sources (flax, walnut, hemp, chia) are rich in ALA while marine animal sources (wild-caught salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel) and algae are rich in EPA and DHA.

Aim to eat omega-3 rich foods 2-3 times per week. If you don't like fatty fish, talk to your registered dietitian nutritionist about a supplement. Supplements are **NOT** all equal. Make sure you are getting a good quality supplement and taking the appropriate dosage.

Industrially Processed Fats and Oils

Trans fats are an especially dangerous type of highly processed fat that is banned in many countries including the U.S. They are vegetable oils that have been partially hydrogenated, usually to help extend the shelf life of a product. These types of fats have been shown to increase inflammation and greatly increase your risk of diabetes and heart disease. As manufacturers have removed trans fat from their products, many have replaced them with shelf-stable saturated fats such as refined palm oil and high oleic oils which are still highly processed.

Industrial seed oils extracted from soybeans, corn, rapeseed (source of canola oil), cottonseed and safflower seeds undergo extensive heat and chemical processing that cause the fats to become damaged and oxidized. These oils are also higher in omega-6 fatty acids which contributes in an unfavorable omega-6:omega-3 ratio. The end result – a chronic state of inflammation that is involved in many chronic disease processes.

Key Points and Recommendations

- **Have whole, unprocessed, high quality fats at each meal.** Rotate through nuts, seeds (hemp, flax, and chia, too), fatty fish, pasture-raised/grass-fed animals and eggs, olives, avocado, coconut and cold pressed oils. If you don't eat fish, speak to a registered dietitian nutritionist or health care provider before starting a fish oil supplement to determine appropriate dosage and discuss high-quality brands.
- **Limit or avoid highly processed, artificially created and factory farmed foods,** which contain unhealthy fats.
- When trying to figure out how to incorporate fats into your meals, the plate template below is a good place to start. Speak with a registered dietitian nutritionist for individual recommendations.

