What’s Up with Fats in our Diet?

Saturated Fats: Most animal fats are saturated as well as tropical oils such as coconut and palm. Saturated fats tend to have higher melting points than unsaturated fats and are usually solid at room temperature. They are pretty resistant to oxidation and smoking when used for high heat frying.

Polyunsaturated and Monounsaturated Fats: Oils that contain unsaturated fats are typically liquid at room temperature but start to turn solid when chilled. Oils high in polyunsaturated fats like corn, soy, and sunflower are not so good for frying as they oxidize and smoke at lower temperatures. The two most common polyunsaturated fatty acids are omega-3 fatty acid (alpha-linolenic acid) and omega-6 fatty acid (linoleic acid). Oils high in monounsaturated fats, like peanut, canola, olive, safflower, and sesame are better for high heat frying like the saturated fats, but better for heart health.

Trans Fats and Hydrogenated Oils: A chemical processing of the oil called hydrogenation solidifies liquid oils and increases their shelf life and flavor stability of the oils and foods that contain them. Trans-fats (from partially hydrogenated oils—check your Nutrition Facts label) is found in vegetable shortenings and in some margarines, crackers, cookies, snack foods and other foods. Fully hydrogenated oils are firmer and have no trans-fats. Natural trans-fats found in meats and dairy are not considered to be as much a concern because of its very small amount in the food.

Cholesterol: Cholesterol is found only in animal products, and coconut and palm oils. Most margarines contain little or no cholesterol. Butter contains a significant amount of cholesterol. From recent research, we now know that the body creates cholesterol in much larger amounts than what we eat. Cholesterol in food does not necessarily affect your blood cholesterol levels.

Butter is a solid dairy product that is high in saturated fat but has no trans-fats.

Margarine was developed as a substitute for butter and is made from plant-based oils such as canola, palm fruit, and soybean oil. Stick margarine, which is a partially hydrogenated, contains trans-fat. Light or soft tub margarine have more water in them than regular margarine, making it lower in calories and saturated fat, and often no partially hydrogenated oils (to avoid trans-fats).

Margarine with phytosterols: Phytosterols are plant-based compounds similar in structure to cholesterol. Because of this, they compete with cholesterol for absorption in the body, and therefore reducing blood cholesterol. Margarines with phytosterols contain a blend of oils such as olive or flaxseed. They cost more than regular spreads. One or two tablespoons every day is the recommended amount to reduce LDL cholesterol levels in the blood, a good thing.

Coconut Oil: High in saturated fat, this oil is great for frying but not for heart health. Although the lauric fatty acid in coconut oil may raise the beneficial HDL cholesterol in the blood more than other fats do, there is no evidence that consuming coconut oil can lower the risk of heart disease (April 2016 Nutrition Reviews). If you use or eat foods made with coconut oil, do so in moderation and not every day.
What should I eat? Focus on eating foods containing fats that are low or lower in saturated and no trans-fats. These include:
1. Using fat-free, 1% and low-fat milk products;
2. Eating poultry without skin and lean meats (such as the “loin” and “round” cuts that have less fat);
3. Eating fatty fish such as salmon, trout, albacore tuna and sardines (high in omega-3 fatty acids);
4. Eating unsalted nuts, seeds, and legumes (dried beans or peas); and
5. Using non-tropical vegetable oils like canola, corn, olive, or safflower oils.

What should I limit? When it comes to foods containing fats, limit:
1. Eating the visible fat on meats;
2. Full-fat dairy products like whole milk, cream, ice cream, butter, cheese;
3. Baked goods made with saturated and trans fats like donuts, cakes, cookies;
4. Foods with “partially hydrogenated oils” on the ingredients panel;
5. Saturated oils like coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oil;
6. Solid fats like shortening, stick margarine and lard;
7. Most fried foods unless using the proper oils and cooking temperatures. For good health also limit:
8. Foods with a lot of sodium (salt);
9. Sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages; and
10. Meats that have been processed with a lot of sodium, (deli meats, hot dogs).

What are some cooking tips?
1. Use a rack to drain off fat when you broil, roast or bake poultry and meats;
2. Don’t baste with drippings; use wine, fruit juice or marinade;
3. Broil or grill instead of pan-frying. Avoid burning the food and/or the cooking oil (it is smoking);
4. Use a vegetable oil spray or olive, canola, peanut, safflower or sesame oil to brown or sauté foods; and

Resources: http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/304283.php
http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/cracking-the-coconut-oil-craze-2017041011513
http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@hcm/documents/downloadable/ucm_300460.pdf

Have a nutritional question or concern? If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County's Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian. Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 372-1622, ext. 269. Leave a message, if necessary, for the dietitian to call you back.

Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services denies no person services or access to service based upon race, color, sex, religion, national origin, marital status and/or handicapping conditions. Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services is primarily funded with County tax dollars. Supplemental funding is through the New York State Office for the Aging under Title III-B/D, III-C-1, III-C-2, III-F of the Federal Older Americans Act, and New York State Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly (EISEP), Community Services for the Elderly Act (CSE), Congregate Services Initiative (CSI), and the Wellness In Nutrition (WIN).

Consumer-centered access for long-term care information, referrals and assessments. For information, call 382-8481, #9, ext.304
Healthy Fats Quiz Questions
1. Lettuce has fat in it. True or False.
2. Why are “bad” fats so bad for you? (a) They increase “bad” cholesterol and may clog arteries. (b) They have too many calories. (c) Both of the above
3. What is the best way to limit less healthy fats? (a) Check ingredient label. (b) Check the nutrition facts label. (c) Both
4. Which spreads are best for your heart? (a) Margarine or (b) Butter
5. There are less calories in “light” olive oil than “extra virgin olive oil.” True or False
6. What is the shelf life of olive oil? (a) A few months. (b) Several years. (c) About one year.
7. What’s so good about salmon, mackerel, and sardines? (a) They are rich in anti-oxidants. (b) They are rich in omega-3 fatty acids. (c) They are rich in flavonoids.
8. It’s not about how much fat you eat but what kind of fat you eat. True or False
9. How much oil should you have daily? (a) It depends. (b) One to two teaspoons. (c) Less than one teaspoon.
10. What is the better oil to fry with? (a) Soy. (b) Peanut. (c) Corn.

Quiz Answers

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FATS
THE GOOD
THE BAD
& THE UGLY

GOOD
Monounsaturated & Polyunsaturated Fats
- Can lower bad cholesterol levels
- Can lower risk of heart disease & stroke
- Can provide essential fats that your body needs but can’t produce itself

SOURCE
Plant-based liquid oils, nuts, seeds and fatty fish

EXAMPLES
- Oils (such as canola, olive, peanut, safflower and sesame)
- Avocados
- Fatty Fish (such as tuna, herring, lake trout, mackerel, salmon and sardines)
- Nuts & Seeds (such as flaxseed, sunflower seeds and walnuts)

BAD
Saturated Fats
- Can raise bad cholesterol levels
- Can lower good cholesterol levels
- Can increase risk of heart disease & stroke

SOURCE
Most saturated fats come from animal sources, including meat and dairy, and from tropical oils

EXAMPLES
- Beef, Pork & Chicken Fat
- Butter
- Cheese (such as whole milk cheeses)
- Tropical Oils (such as coconut, palm kernel and palm oils)

UGLY
Hydrogenated Oils & Trans Fats
- Can raise bad cholesterol levels
- Can lower good cholesterol levels
- Can increase risk of heart disease & stroke
- Can increase risk of type 2 diabetes

SOURCE
Processed foods made with partially hydrogenated oils

EXAMPLES
- Partially Hydrogenated Oils
- Some Baked Goods
- Fried Foods
- Stick of Margarine

Eat a diet that:

Includes GOOD FATS (nuts, seeds, fatty fish, non tropical oils)

Limits saturated fats to no more than 5-6% of calories

Keeps trans fats as LOW as possible

For more information, go to heart.org/fats