

# How Fats Compare



**F**at is a necessary part of a healthy eating plan. It supplies your body with energy and essential fatty acids (EFA). Fat from your diet also helps you to absorb vitamins such as A, D, E and K. Unfortunately, not all fats are created equal. The key to healthier eating? Choose foods with fats that help protect your heart and reduce your heart disease risk.

Research shows that a very low-fat diet is not necessary to protect the heart.

Instead, the goal is to eat a moderate amount of healthy fat combined with more fiber-rich whole grains each day. A moderate amount of fat means no more than 25-35 percent of your total daily calories come from fat.

Eating foods with lots of saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol can raise the LDL (or bad cholesterol) and triglyceride

levels in your blood. Having high levels of LDL and triglycerides puts you at greater risk for heart disease. Trans fats also increase your risk for heart disease because they lower HDL, or the 'good' cholesterol. A high level of HDL cholesterol in your blood helps to protect your heart.

## Which fats help to protect my heart?

- Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats help to raise your HDL level.
- Omega-3s, an important polyunsaturated fat, are found in fish oils and some plant sources and protect your heart in several ways. Omega-3 fatty acids help to reduce inflammation inside your blood vessels, which slows plaque build-up in the arteries, a process also called atherosclerosis. Selecting up to 12 ounces of fish a week helps your heart while limiting your exposure to toxins like mercury found in some types of fish.
- For pregnant and nursing women or women who plan to get pregnant, we recommend that they eat no more than 6 ounces of fish a week.
- Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) comes mainly from plant sources and turns into omega-3 fatty acids in the body. ALA may also help to lower the risk of heart disease.
- Plant sterols and stanols (phytosterols) help lower LDL cholesterol. Tub, liquid, or squeeze margarine products, some cheese, and fruit juices are available with these beneficial compounds.
- Omega-3 supplements and other products may not be appropriate or necessary for you depending upon your current health and risk for heart disease. Some people may be at high risk for bleeding with large doses of fish oil supplements. Discuss whether or not they are recommended for you with your healthcare team before you start to use them.

## How do I find foods that will help protect my heart?

Read food labels carefully. Compare the nutrition information of similar food products when you shop. Foods with less than 3 grams of fat in a serving are low-fat. They may be heart healthy options. To avoid foods that contain trans fats, choose foods without any 'partially hydrogenated' oils or shortening listed on the label. For example, many types of tub or squeeze margarine are better choices than stick margarines, which have trans fat. Review the chart on the next page to see lists of foods with fats that can protect your heart and those foods with fats to avoid.



## Foods with Healthy and Harmful Types of Fats

Choose in moderation			Limit as much as possible	
High in monounsaturated fats	High in polyunsaturated fats	High in omega-3 fat*	High in saturated fats	High in trans fats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>olive oil</li> <li>canola oil</li> <li>peanut oil and peanut butter</li> <li>olives</li> <li>avocados</li> <li>almonds</li> <li>pecans</li> <li>macadamia nuts</li> <li>cashews</li> <li>hazelnuts</li> <li>pistachio nuts</li> <li>peanuts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>safflower oil</li> <li>corn oil</li> <li>walnuts</li> <li>soybeans</li> <li>sunflower oil and seeds</li> <li>sesame oil and seeds</li> <li>oils made from seeds</li> <li>brazil nuts (about equal amounts of mono- and polyunsaturated fats)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>salmon</li> <li>sardines</li> <li>mackerel (pacific or jack)</li> <li>herring</li> <li>tuna (canned light)</li> <li>tuna (albacore)</li> <li>pollack</li> <li>trout</li> <li>soybean oil</li> <li>walnuts</li> <li>walnut oil</li> <li>ground flaxseeds</li> <li>flaxseed oil</li> <li>canola oil</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pastries, pies, and bakery items</li> <li>palm oil, palm kernel oil, and coconut oil</li> <li>heavily marbled meats</li> <li>meats high in fat, such as sausage, cold cuts, hot dogs, bacon</li> <li>chicken fat and skin</li> <li>Butter and dairy products with whole milk, such as cheese, cream, whole milk, and ice cream</li> </ul>	Processed foods including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>chips</li> <li>cookies, pastries</li> <li>fried foods</li> <li>fast food</li> <li>crackers</li> <li>stick margarine</li> <li>regular shortening</li> </ul>

\*The fish listed tend to have lower amounts of mercury.

## Are you ready to make some changes?

Indicate on the scale below how ready you are to make a change. 10 means that you are very ready, and 0 means that you are not ready at all. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Check the food label when I buy products to find those with little or no trans fat.
- Add more fish to my diet.
- Add more fiber to my diet by eating more fruits/vegetables and whole grain foods each day.
- Consult my provider about which fish oil, ALA supplements, or other products could help me lower my risk for heart disease.



*If you circled*

*Consider these questions*

3 or less

What would need to happen for me to become more ready to make changes?

4 to 6

What are some of the advantages of keeping things the same and not making any changes?  
 What are some of the advantages of eating a healthier diet?

7 to 10

What is the next step to create a realistic plan to eat healthier?  
 Who can support me as I make changes?

### Other resources

- Ask your provider for a referral to a registered dietitian.
- Visit [kp.org/mercuryinfish](http://kp.org/mercuryinfish)
- Check FDA's Seafood Information and Resources website: [cfsan.fda.gov/seafood1.html](http://cfsan.fda.gov/seafood1.html)
- Call 1-888-SAFEFOOD, CFSAN's toll-free information line.
- For other health education resources please visit [kp.org/healthyliving](http://kp.org/healthyliving)

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor.