

## Know your fats – and eat them in moderation

March is National Nutrition Month®. The following article provides information on an essential nutrient – fat – which is often over-consumed and usually misunderstood. We tend to eat too much fat and the wrong kinds, which may increase our health risks.

By its very name, “fat” implies that it’s not good for you. While it’s true that fat contributes twice as many calories per gram as protein or carbohydrates, it is a required nutrient that should be included – in limited doses – in one’s daily diet. That’s because fatty acids support a number of functions, including growth in children, healthy skin, hormone production and the absorption of essential vitamins and minerals.

But not all fats are created equal. For example, *monounsaturated* fats and *polyunsaturated* fats are preferred because they do not raise low-density lipoprotein (LDL) or “bad” cholesterol. (See box on page 2 for specific examples.)

On the other hand, the American Heart Association warns that *saturated fat*, *trans fat*, and dietary cholesterol can raise LDL cholesterol levels in the blood and lower your high-density lipoprotein (HDL) “good” cholesterol.” This imbalance can cause the arteries to become clogged and increases the risk of developing heart disease and stroke.

### Read and understand labels

The *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, produced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, recommend that individuals limit their total fat intake from 20 percent to 35 percent of calories. The guidelines also state that most fats should come from foods that provide polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids.

One way to better understand fat content in the foods you eat is to read and interpret the nutrition facts labels that appear on most all packaged foods. Such labels indicate a product’s total fat, including the percentage and number of grams of saturated fats. As of this year, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) now requires food companies to list out grams of trans fat content separately from saturated fats. Under new rules, consumers can see how much saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol are in foods they choose, if the amount of such fats is at least 0.5 gram per serving.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 slice (47g)	
Servings Per Container 8	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 160 Calories from Fat 90	
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 10g	15%
Saturated Fat 2.5g	11%
Trans Fat 2g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 300mg	12%
Total Carbohydrate 15g	5%
Dietary Fiber less than 1g	3%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 3g	

Note that the FDA extended the trans fat deadline for certain companies on request. So, the American Heart Association cautions that just because trans fat does not appear on a particular label, at least for now, it does not mean that the product is completely free of trans fats.

## Choose fats wisely

Action to take	Fat group	Food sources
<b>Focus on foods that contain:</b>	<b>Monounsaturated fats</b> (from plant sources)	Canola oil, olive oil and peanut oil and avocados.
	<b>Polyunsaturated fats</b> (found in oils from plant sources and certain fish)	Safflower oil, sesame oil, corn oil Soybeans, many nuts and seeds  Fatty fish, such as salmon.
<b>Try to avoid:</b>	<b>Saturated fats</b> (from animal sources and certain plants)	Beef, veal, lamb, port, poultry fat, lard, butter, cream, cheese and whole-milk products.  Palm, coconut or rtropical oils and cocoa butter.
	<b>Trans fats</b> (occur when hydrogen is added to oils to make them more solid in nature)	Shortening, stick margarines, cookies, crackers, snack foods, fried foods and pastries.  Meat and dairy products may contain a small portion of trans fats.

### How much fat is too much?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture suggests the following portions sizes of fats per day, based on gender and age. Use these guidelines to determine fat intake in your diet.

Daily allowance*		
<b>Children</b>	2-3 years old	3 teaspoons
	4-8 years old	4 teaspoons
<b>Girls</b>	9-13 years old	5 teaspoons
	14-18 years old	5 teaspoons
<b>Boys</b>	9-13 years old	5 teaspoons
<b>Women</b>	19-30 years old	6 teaspoons
	31+ years old	5 teaspoons
<b>Men</b>	19-30 years old	7 teaspoons
	31+ years old-	6 teaspoons

\*Source: [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov). (The U.S. Department of Agriculture) Amounts shown are appropriate for individuals who get less than 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity, beyond normal daily activities. Those who are more physically active may be able to consume more while staying within calorie needs.

For more information on fats, go to [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov), [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org), and [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines).