DIETARY FAT: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND HOW TO EAT THE RIGHT ONES

On any nutrition label, four different kinds of fat may be listed: trans, saturated, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated. Each fatty acid has a unique nutrition profile based on the structure of the molecule. The differences in molecular structure determine how the fat will be digested and absorbed in the body, ultimately influencing heart health and diabetes risk. All fats and oils consist of triglycerides made up of fatty acids and glycerol.

**GOOD FATS ARE OMEGAS.**

Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats also may be known by another name: Omegas. Omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids are two types of polyunsaturated fat, and omega-9 fatty acids are monounsaturated fats. Each omega fatty acid has a specific role in the body, but they all work together to promote health. Incorporating these good fats into a healthy diet can have positive benefits on cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

**NAME**

**KNOWN AS**

**DIETARY SOURCE**

**POSITIVE HEALTH EFFECTS**

**OMEGA-3**

Polyunsaturated

- Oils: canola, flax, soybean
- Nuts: walnuts
- Fish: oily fishes (herring, mackerel, salmon, trout, tuna)
- Other: algae, Omega-3 eggs

- Brain development, heart health, cholesterol, cognition, mood

**OMEGA-6**

Polyunsaturated

- Oils: canola, corn, olive, peanut, safflower, soybean, sunflower
- Nuts: almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, walnuts
- Other: eggs

- Heart health, cholesterol

**OMEGA-9**

Monounsaturated

- Oils: canola, olive, peanut, safflower, sunflower
- Nuts: almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamias, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, walnuts
- Other: avocados, eggs, poultry

- Heart health, cholesterol, blood sugar control
GOOD FATS ARE FOUND IN FOODS YOU EAT EVERY DAY.

Grocery stores carry good fats in many different forms, including:

- Healthy oils (canola, olive oil and sunflower oil): Healthy oils are not just in bottles on the shelf, many of your favorite foods include healthier oils, which means they contain good fats
- Nuts (almonds, pistachios, walnuts)
- Fatty fish (salmon, tuna)
- Some fruits (avocados, olives)

Nutrition labels, ingredient lists and front-of-pack messages can help you identify good fats.

- Do not be deceived by “low fat” or “fat-free” claims. “Low fat” also can suggest “high sugar.” Fat is an important component of the diet, so choose products that include good fats.5
- Look for ingredients such as canola oil or sunflower oil to indicate good fats.
- Watch out for ingredients such as partially hydrogenated oils (trans fats) and palm oils (high in saturated fat).
- Some nutrition labels will display the good fats information, but it is not a federal requirement on the label, so you may have to do the math yourself. Subtract grams of trans and saturated fat from grams of total fat on the nutrition label to determine how many grams of combined polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are included.
- Look for packaging claims outside the nutrition label that indicate good fats have replaced bad fats, such as “contains x grams of omega-3 fatty acids” or “provides x grams of omega-6 fatty acids.”6
- Look for ingredients such as canola oil instead of partially hydrogenated oils, which indicates the presence of trans fats.6

The USDA recommends Americans consume 20-35% of calories from fat. Here are targets for maximizing good fats within total fat intake:

- At least 10-25% of calories from combined polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids3,
- Less than 10% of calories from saturated fatty acids4
- Less than 1% of calories from trans fats4,5

In an average 2,000-calorie diet, you should consume 22-55 grams of Omega-3, 6 and 9 daily4 to ensure that you’re meeting the USDA’s dietary fat recommendations and maintaining heart-healthy habits. Canada also has developed regulations for good fats. According to their guidelines, Canadians should include a small amount (30-45 ml/2-3 tbsp) of unsaturated fat in their daily diet. This includes healthy oils and margarines.

*Range based on USDA recommendations for total calories from fat