

Focusing on Fat

From WebMD Health with The Cleveland Clinic

Q

Why is it important to reduce fat intake?

A

High fat intake contributes to excess body weight, since a gram of fat has about twice as many calories per gram as carbohydrates and proteins.

Whether you are trying to lose weight, lower blood cholesterol levels or simply eat healthier, you'll want to limit total fat intake.

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Why do most diets focus on reducing fat?

A

Fat gets all of the attention for many good reasons. Fat can raise cholesterol levels in the blood, increasing a person's risk for heart disease.

In addition, some fatty foods (such as bacon, sausage, and potato chips) often have fewer vitamins and minerals than low-fat foods.

Moreover as mentioned, fat has about twice as many calories per gram as carbohydrates and proteins. A gram of fat has about 9 calories, while a gram of carbohydrate or protein has about 4 calories. In other words, you could eat twice as much carbohydrates or proteins as fat for the same amount of calories.

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Will I lose weight if I eat low-fat foods?

A

It's true that a diet high in fat can lead to weight gain. But it takes more than just eating low-fat foods to lose weight. You must also watch how many calories you eat. Remember, extra calories even from fat-free and low-fat foods get stored in the body as fat. Many times people replace high-fat foods for high-calorie foods, like sweets, and gain weight rather than lose weight.

To lose weight, you need to burn more calories than you eat. You can achieve this goal by exercising and by eating less fat and calories.

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How much fat should I eat?

A

The dietary reference intake for fat in adults is 20-35% of total daily calories from fat. That's about 44 grams of fat or less a day if you eat 2,000 calories a day.

Recently, health experts have started to recommend that people eliminate another type of fat called trans fat from their diet. This fat, formed during a process called hydrogenation, converts a relatively healthy unsaturated liquid fat, like corn oil into a solid one. Although this process

gives the fat longer shelf life it also makes the fats act like saturated fat in our bodies, and may be worse when it comes to causing heart disease.

Health experts recommend removing as much trans fat from your diet as possible.

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How can I know how much fat I am eating?

A

Learn about the foods you eat. Fat and calorie listings for individual foods can be found in nutrition books at your local library and on food packages.

Read nutrition labels on food packages. Nutrition labels show the number of grams of fat per serving. They also show the daily percentage of fat provided in each serving. In other words, if the daily percentage of fat per serving is 18%, each serving provides 18% of the total fat you should eat for the day. Choose a brand that has a lower fat percentage. (The daily percentage value is based on a number of calories listed on the nutrition label, usually 2,000. Your calorie needs may be higher or lower.)

More and more food labels are starting to include trans fats. If the amount of trans fats is not including on the label, you can estimate the amount by adding up the total amount of polyunsaturated, monounsaturated and saturated fat. If that's less than the total fat on the package, the difference is trans fat.

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Where do I start?

A

- * Eat a variety of lower-fat foods to get all the nutrients you need.
- * Watch your calorie intake. Remember, "low fat" does not always mean "low calorie."
- * Eat plenty of plant-based foods (such as grain products, fruits and vegetables) and a moderate amount of animal-based foods (meat and dairy products) to help control your fat, cholesterol and calorie intake.
- * Increase your physical activity to improve heart health and lose excess body fat.

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What goals should I try to meet?

A

- * Decrease the total amount of fat you eat to 20%-35% or less of your total daily calories. For a person eating 2,000 calories a day, this would be 44-77 grams of fat or less per day.
- * Limit cholesterol intake to 300 milligrams (mg) or less per day.
- * Decrease saturated fat (animal fat, butter, coconut and palm oils) to less than 10% of your total calories per day. For a person eating 2000 calories a day, this would be 22 grams of saturated fat or less per day.

Tips For Reducing Fat Intake

When selecting foods:

- * Learn about the foods you eat by reading nutrition labels. Look for "low-fat," "nonfat" and "reduced-fat" claims on food packages. Focus on total fat, rather than individual items. When selecting food, balance those with a higher fat amount against those with a lower fat amount to stay within your fat total or "budget" for the day.
- * Choose lean meats, fish and poultry. Limit these to 5-7 ounces per day. Other good low-fat sources of protein include dried beans and peas, tofu, low-fat yogurt, low-fat milk, low-fat cottage cheese and tuna fish packed in water. Choose skim or 1% milk.
- * Enjoy low-fat (no more than 3 grams of fat per ounce) or nonfat cheeses and spreads. Try low-fat or fat-free versions of your favorite margarine, salad dressing, cream cheese and mayonnaise.

When preparing foods:

- * Trim all visible fat and remove the skin from poultry.
- * Refrigerate soups, gravies and stews, and remove the hardened fat before eating.
- * Bake, broil or grill meats on a rack that allows fat to drip from the meat. Avoid frying foods.
- * Sprinkle lemon juice and herbs/spices on cooked vegetables instead of using cheese, butter or cream-based sauces.
- * Try plain, nonfat or low-fat yogurt and chives on baked potatoes rather than sour cream. Reduced-fat sour cream still contains fat, so you must limit the amount you use.

When dining out:

- * Choose simply-prepared foods such as broiled, roasted or baked fish or chicken. Avoid fried or sautéed foods, casseroles, and foods with heavy sauces and gravies.
- * Request that your food be cooked without added butter, margarine, gravy or sauces.
- * Request salad with low-fat dressing on the side.
- * Select fruit, angel food cake, nonfat frozen yogurt, sherbet or sorbet for dessert instead of ice cream, cake or pie.

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