

# Fat and Cholesterol

A registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) can help you set specific nutrition goals and guide you in planning a personalized healthy eating pattern.

To find an RDN in your area, visit “Find an Expert” at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)



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Understanding fat and cholesterol is important for building a healthy eating pattern. It can help you keep your heart healthy, manage your weight, and lower your risk for diabetes. When you know the types of fats and which foods contain fat and cholesterol, you can make healthier food choices.



## How does dietary fat affect my health?

For good health, your body needs a certain amount of fat from food, also called dietary fat. This fat provides energy and helps you feel full. Fat also helps your body absorb vitamins A, D, E, and K and supplies important components that your body can't produce.

Dietary fat is found in both plant and animal foods. Even though there are different types of dietary fat, all types are calorie-dense. This means that fat supplies more calories compared to protein and carbohydrates. However, not all types of fat have the same effects on our health.

### Saturated fats

Saturated fats are solid at room temperature and often referred to as “solid fats.” Eating too much saturated fat can raise your blood cholesterol level and increase your risk for heart disease and stroke.

Foods with saturated fat include:

- meat and poultry
- butter and whole milk dairy products
- tropical oils (such as coconut and palm oils)

### Trans fats

*Trans* fats are found naturally in some foods, such as meats and whole milk dairy products, but the amount of *trans* fat in these foods are very small. Other *trans* fats are created when oils are converted to solid fats during processing. These *trans* fats are linked to greater risk for heart disease. Products that include “partially hydrogenated oil” in the ingredient list contain *trans* fat, but if the amount is less than 0.5 grams, the label amount can be listed as 0 grams. Eating too many foods with even small amounts of *trans* fat can add up.

Some foods that may contain *trans* fats include:

- packaged snack foods
- coffee creamers
- refrigerated dough products
- baked items, such as pastries, doughnuts, cookies, and crackers

### Unsaturated fats

Unsaturated fats are usually liquid at room temperature. These fats are better for your heart's health, and they may help reduce your risk of heart disease.

Foods with unsaturated fats include:

- vegetable oils
- nuts and seeds
- olives
- avocados
- fish

Omega-3 fats are a type of unsaturated fat found in seafood, such as salmon, trout, sardines, herring, tuna, and mackerel, and in flax seeds and walnuts.