



## Healthy Eating Initiative: Know Which Dietary Fats to Choose

Fats are important for how your body uses many vitamins. Fats also play a role in how all cells in the body are made and work. However, all dietary fats are not the same. Some dietary fats are essential while others increase the risk for disease and health complications.

The two main kinds of dietary fats are saturated and unsaturated fats. Saturated fats are usually solid at room temperature and commonly come from meats and dairy products. The American Heart Association suggests consuming no more than 6% of daily calories from saturated fats. Foods that combine meat and dairy products can cause saturated fat levels to add up quickly. The most common examples are sandwiches, burgers, tacos, burritos, baked goods with butter, full-fat ice cream, among others. Saturated fat raises the levels of "bad" cholesterol, also known as Low-density Lipoprotein (LDL). This fat increases the risk of heart and blood vessel disease.

Unsaturated fats are usually liquid at room temperature. Vegetable oils, nuts, and fish have mostly unsaturated fats. The two types of unsaturated fats are monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Many plants and plant oils are high in monounsaturated fats, but low in saturated fats. These include oils from olives, peanuts, canola and sunflower seeds, almonds, pumpkin seeds, and avocados. Replacing saturated fats with monounsaturated fats in the diet, particularly extra virgin olive oil and tree nuts, benefits heart health by lowering bad cholesterol and triglycerides, raising good cholesterol levels called High-density Lipoprotein (HDL). Monounsaturated fats also improve blood sugar regulation. Polyunsaturated fats are omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids. These are found in fish such as salmon, sardines and tuna, chia seeds, flaxseed, walnuts, and sunflower and peanut oils.

Trans fats are partially hydrogenated oils which raise bad cholesterol and lowers good cholesterol. They are plant oils that have been chemically changed to be a solid fat. As of 2020, trans fats are no longer used in U.S. food production as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has determined that they are not safe in foods.

Focus on eating healthy fats and limiting unhealthy fats by eating more fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains. Try the following tips to help reduce unhealthy fat in your diet:

- **Use plant-based oils such** as olive or canola oil instead of butter or lard.
- Add **oily fish** to your diet.
- Choose **lean meat and skinless poultry**; ensure that you trim fat and remove skin from poultry.
- Eat and drink **low-fat dairy products** or limit them all together.
- **Limit processed foods**, which often contain saturated and trans fats.
- **Check labels on low-fat or fat-free processed food**, which may have lots of **added sugars and sodium (salt)**.
- Reach for **whole fruits and vegetables** when you want a snack.



*Department of Defense*

# Work-Life Programs

Health & Wellness



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### **Additional Resources:**

- Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/fat/art-20045550>
- Harvard Health: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-truth-about-fats-bad-and-good>
- Biotics Research: <https://blog.bioticsresearch.com/9-benefits-of-healthy-fats>

For additional information, email the DCPAS Work-Life Branch at: [dodhra.mcalex.dcpas.mbx.dod-worklife@mail.mil](mailto:dodhra.mcalex.dcpas.mbx.dod-worklife@mail.mil)

