

NMS Nutrition Notes

Facts on Fat

Fat is found in a variety of foods, such as meats, nuts, milk, cheese, margarine, butter, oils and salad dressings. Fat is made up of cholesterol and fatty acids (poly-unsaturates, mono-unsaturates, saturates, and trans fat). Our bodies need cholesterol and fatty acids to function. Some fats are good for our bodies, others are not. Following is some information about fats to help you make wise decisions about the foods you choose to include in your diet.

LDL



HDL



Cholesterol is present in animal products. Cholesterol in our bodies is classified as LDL, or “bad”, or HDL, or “good” cholesterol. High LDL cholesterol is a marker for heart disease and stroke, while HDL cholesterol is known for being protective to heart health. While dietary cholesterol intake does impact blood cholesterol levels, the type of fat in a diet greatly influences blood cholesterol levels. Unsaturated fats lower LDL cholesterol while increasing levels of the healthy HDL cholesterol. Saturated fats increase your level of LDL cholesterol without affecting HDL cholesterol. Foods such as eggs and shrimp contain cholesterol, yet are low in saturated fat and therefore can be enjoyed in moderation.



Poly-Unsaturates include the omega-3 and omega-6 family of fats. These fats are considered essential as our bodies cannot produce them. All unsaturated fats are healthy, and replacing trans and saturated fats with unsaturated fats can improve your cholesterol levels and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. The omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids found in fatty fish may also lower blood triglyceride levels and improve immune and inflammatory disorders.



Mono-Unsaturates are the predominant fat in plant products. As with poly-unsaturates, these fats are considered heart healthy, though they are not essential to humans.



Saturates are found in animal products. Fatty meats and high fat dairy products such as cheese are the main source of saturated fats in Canadian diets. Some saturated fats have been implicated in increasing your chance of heart disease and stroke. The various saturated fats are being studied closely to determine which pose a risk to heart health.



Trans Fats are industrially produced when vegetable oils are partially hydrogenated. Trans fat not only increases your “bad” cholesterol but also decreases your “good” cholesterol, and is the most risky fat for heart disease. Trans fat may also increase blood vessel inflammation that increases risk for other chronic health problems. For this reason, Health Canada now mandates that all food labels list the trans fat content of foods.

Considerations at the Grocery Store

Butter Vs. Margarine - What is the difference between butter and margarine? Both contain the same amount of fat and energy. However, butter comes from an animal source (milk fat) and margarine comes from a plant source (vegetable oil). Butter contains a higher amount of saturated fat than margarine. Depending on the brand, margarine contains more trans fat than butter. Make sure you read the labels to ensure that you are making a wise choice.



Tropical Oils - There are four such oils: coconut, palm, palm kernel, and cocoa butter. Such oils are known to be high in saturated fat. The claim “no tropical oil” means that the food does not contain any tropical oil, but it does not mean that the food isn't high in other fats. Fats like hydrogenated vegetable oil contain just as much saturated fat.



Ground Beef - When shopping for ground beef in the grocery store you will see the packaging labeled as “regular”, “medium” or “lean”. This is referring to the fat content. Regular ground beef contains a maximum fat content of 30%, medium contains 23% and lean contains 17%. Choose lean where possible.



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