

# Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



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## Facts and Fiction About Fat

If you're confused about fats these days, you're in good company. With research coming in at breakneck speed in recent years, even experts have a hard time agreeing about which fats we should consume, and in what exact proportions, to improve our health

and prevent chronic disease. In this month's newsletter we review what the strongest evidence says about healthy choices to make at the grocery store and in your kitchen.

### Are Saturated Fats Still Bad?

In a word, Yes! However there is more. The best available evidence suggests that saturated fat found in



such food as meat, fullfat cheese, ice cream, and cake is still worse for you than the unsaturated fat in vegetable oils, nuts, and avocados. According to a recent report from the United Nations, there is convincing evidence that replacing saturated fat with polyunsaturated fat reduces the risk of heart disease. And a 2012 review of studies by the independent Cochrane Collaboration found that replacing saturated fat with unsaturated fat lowered the risk of cardiovascular events, such as heart attacks and strokes.

The authors reported that for every 1,000 people in the studies, there were 77 such events for people on a regular diet compared with 66 for those on a reduced saturated-fat diet.

There's an important caveat, which can make the message here some-

what confusing:

When cutting saturated fats, substitute with healthful alternatives, not refined carbohydrates (which are found in such items as white bread, pizza, and snack foods). Otherwise, you probably won't reduce your risk of heart disease and may well increase it. It's not that saturated fats aren't bad anymore, it's that saturated fats and refined carbohydrates are equally bad.

### Which are better: Mono or Polyunsaturated oils?

Nutritionists can't agree about this one, though they do agree that unsaturated fats are better than saturated ones. On the one hand, there is plenty of evidence to support the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet, which calls for generous amounts of olive oil, a mostly

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## Facts and Fiction About Fat

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monounsaturated fat. But when researchers make direct comparisons of mono- and polyunsaturated fats, they generally find stronger evidence of a cardio-protective effect for polyunsaturated fat, found abundantly in safflower, soybean, and sunflower oils.

The American Heart Association recommends minimum dietary intake levels for certain polyunsaturated fats that the body has trouble synthesizing on its own. Get at least 5 percent to 10 percent of fat calories from omega-6 polyunsaturated fats, and eating at least two servings a week of fish rich in omega-3 polyunsaturated fats.

Choosing a variety of plant-based oils, plus low-mercury fish such as salmon twice a week, will help you meet the recommended intake levels and get plenty of all the “good” fats.

### Should I consider The Omega-6 to Omega-3 ratio?

Omega-6 and omega-3 are two types of polyunsaturated fat—a “good” fat.

Many studies suggest that diets rich in two omega-3 fats—eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), found in high levels in fish are linked to lower rates of cardiovascular disease. To maximize those heart benefits, some experts recommend limiting omega-6 fat found in sources such as corn oil and soybean oil, which have become common in the human diet only in the past 100 years or so, and getting more omega-3s from traditional sources such as fish.

Can you get enough omega-3 from oils without consuming fish or taking supplements? Probably not. Only a small amount of the alpha-linoleic acid (ALA) found in such oils as canola, flaxseed, and soybean is converted in the body to the more-beneficial omega-3s—EPA and DHA.

The American Heart Association’s current position is that both

omega-3 and omega-6 fats are beneficial. They say it is more important to meet the minimum recommended intakes for both fats than to try to achieve any specific consumption ratio.

### Bottom line.

According to the 2010 U.S. Dietary Guidelines, 20 to 35 percent of the calories in a healthful diet should come from fats. Most of that total should consist of plant oils such as canola, olive, and soybean oil (usually labeled simply as vegetable oil). Coconut and palm oils are an exception.

Overall, limit your intake of saturated fats to less than 10 percent of your daily calories. That’s about 4 teaspoons for someone eating a typical 2,000 calorie-a-day diet. To achieve that, eat less animal-based food (full-fat cheese, processed meats, and dairy desserts like ice cream) and highly processed snack food (cakes and cookies). In addition, reduce saturated fat by filling most of your plate with fruit and vegetables.

## Benefits Corner

### 2013 ID CARDS!!!

If you are an active member of the County Health Pool for medical and/or dental coverage, you will be receiving an ID card at some point during this month.

#### New Benefit in 2013

The HealthCare Reform Law (PPACA) has now required the following mandatory items to be covered with no cost sharing;

- Well Women Exams
- Screening for gestational diabetes
- Screening for HPV
- Screening for HIV
- Screening for STDs
- Contraception
- Breastfeeding-supplies, counseling, etc
- Domestic violence counseling

As a reminder, the preventive exams and immunizations for both male and female adults and children will remain covered at 100%.

Note: Covered preventive care services include those that meet the requirements of federal and state law including certain screenings, immunizations, contraceptives and office visits.