



Facts about Fat

People tend to associate fat with health problems such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Yet, Is body fat totally useless? In fact, fat helps us absorb fat-soluble vitamins (e.g. vitamins A, D and E) and provides us with the essential fatty acids, which our body cannot make for itself. It is also the essential building block for cholesterol and hormones and keeps us warm in cold weather. Everyone therefore needs an appropriate amount of fat. So how much fat is the right amount? The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that an individual's daily fat intake should not exceed 30% of his total energy intake. For a normal adult who consumes a diet of 2,000 kcal per day, his upper limit of daily fat intake would be 60 grams (equivalent to 12 teaspoons of oil). This includes the fats that are already in edible oils and foods such as high-fat meats and whole milk products. As for the amount of oil used in cooking, the recommended upper limit is 6 teaspoons per person per day, or not more than 2 teaspoons per person per meal.

Fats can be divided into three types as follows:

- Unsaturated fats: they help lower the level of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (commonly known as “bad” cholesterol) in our bloodstream. Olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil and corn oil are sources of unsaturated fats.
- Saturated fats: they increase the level of “bad” cholesterol in our bloodstream. Sources of saturated fats include lard, butter and coconut oil.
- Trans fats: they increase the level of “bad” cholesterol and lower the level of high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (commonly known as “good” cholesterol). Examples of foods with a high trans fat content include cakes, egg rolls, pastry and French fries.

The WHO recommends that unsaturated fats should make up the majority of our fat intake. Therefore, we should choose edible oils that are rich in unsaturated fats (e.g. corn oil, peanut oil and canola oil). When looking for something to spread on the bread, we can choose trans fat-free margarine.

Facts about Fat (Cont'd)

When cooking with edible oils, we should choose low-fat cooking methods in order to reduce the oil intake. Examples include steaming, sautéing with a non-stick pan and quick stir-frying with little oil. All edible oils, be they healthy or not, provide the same amount of energy (i.e. 9 kcal of energy per gram) and lead to obesity when consumed excessively.

Q:	<p>It is alleged that margarine contains trans fats. So, is it healthier for us if we switch to butter?</p>
A:	<p>No. According to data from the Centre for Food Safety (CFS), butter has a saturated fat content of 66%. As saturated fats increase the level of bad cholesterol in our bloodstream and lead to a higher risk of cardiovascular diseases, butter is not good for health.</p> <p>Meanwhile, trans fats increase the level of bad cholesterol and lower the level of good cholesterol in our bloodstream. Newly formulated margarine products in recent years are low in trans fats and have a lower saturated fat content than butter.</p> <p>You can choose margarine that is lower in trans fats by reading nutritional labels. Trans fat-free margarine, of course, is the most ideal choice.</p>
Q:	<p>Some people claim that coconut oil is beneficial for health. Should we eat more coconut oil?</p>
A:	<p>Coconut oil is not a healthy food choice. According to data from the CFS, coconut oil has a saturated fatty acid content of 92%. Saturated fatty acids increase the level of bad cholesterol and are harmful for cardiac health. To date, there is insufficient clinical evidence to support that coconut oil is beneficial for health.</p>