

Fat: Essential for Life

by Vicki Griffin, MPA, MACN

Fat has gotten an unfair reputation. F-A-T is not spelled B-A-D! Fats are essential for life and health, and plant fats promote optimal health. Here are three easy intake guidelines for fat:

1. Eat fat and high fat foods in moderation, according to your age and activity level.
2. Select "good fats."
3. Even if you are overweight, you need some fat.

What kind of fat is best? Plant fats contain mostly unsaturated fats which include omega 3, omega 6, and monounsaturated fatty acids. Here are some delicious sources to include in your diet:

- Monounsaturated: nuts (walnuts, pecans, almonds, etc.), seeds (sesame, sunflower), avocados, olives, some oils (olive, soy, sesame, canola).
- Omega 3: ground flax seed, walnuts, other nuts, whole soy bean products, canola oil, soy oil.

Here are some tips for switching to more healthful fats as you make your daily food choices.

- Eat regular meals to cut down the urge to snack.

- Fill up on fresh fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads and cereals, beans, nuts, and seeds instead of calorie-dense snacks and fast foods.
- Bake or steam potatoes instead of frying them.
- Enjoy salads with mixed, dark greens with olive oil and lemon instead of heavy cheese dressings. Top your salads with a healthful variety of olives, avocado, and a sprinkling of walnuts for a real tasty treat.
- Enjoy spreads such as hummus and nut butter instead of dairy butter. Enjoy trans-fat-free margarines.
- Choose fresh pineapple, kiwi, or a few strawberries in place of rich desserts.
- Choose fortified soy, almond, or rice milk, or other alternatives to high-fat dairy products.
- Use olive oil and garlic on vegetables in place of butter.
- Edge away from fatty meats by eating more plant-based foods—especially beans and legumes, whole-grain pastas, brown rice, and meat alternatives such as gluten or soy-based entrees.
- Limit high-fat baked products and desserts.
- Limit commercially baked goods; make your own baked goods using healthful fats.
- Avoid fried foods.

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