

Nutrition

fact sheet



There are so many messages about fats these days—good fats, bad fats, *trans* fats. Lately, you've probably been hearing more about *trans* fat. Before making any decisions about changing your diet, you need the facts about the role of fats in a healthy eating plan.

Keeping *Trans* Fats in Focus

Fats supply the body with energy, provide the building blocks for cell membranes and help key systems in the body function properly. They also help the body absorb certain nutrients such as vitamins A, D, E and K. It's important to understand the difference in saturated, unsaturated and *trans* fats.

Are All Fats Bad?

Not all fat is bad. Actually, certain kinds of fat play an important role in health. Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are beneficial forms of fat that promote heart health. These fats help lower blood cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend a daily total fat intake between 20 to 35 percent of calories, with most fats coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats such as fish, nuts and vegetable oils (such as soybean oil).

Saturated fats and *trans* fats can increase blood cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease. It's important to limit the amount of

these fats in your diet. Saturated fats are found mainly in meat, poultry, butter, whole milk and coconut, palm and palm kernel oils. According to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines, Americans should limit their intake of fats and oils high in saturated and/or *trans* fats by choosing foods low in these fats.

What Is Trans Fat?

While *trans* fats are found naturally in some foods, the major source in the diet is partially hydrogenated oil. Examples of foods that may contain *trans* fats are cookies, crackers, muffins, potato chips and stick margarine. Since *trans* fats have been shown to have a similar effect on the body as saturated fats it's important to limit your intake of foods containing *trans* fats. On average, about 2.6 percent of the calories in the typical American diet come from *trans* fats. However, your individual intake depends on your food choices. By selecting foods carefully, you can minimize your consumption of *trans* fats.

New products are now available in the supermarket that are labeled *trans*

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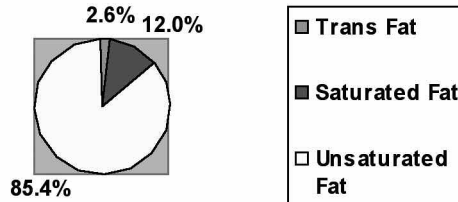
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*Sources of Fat in the
Typical American Diet*

fat free—with more soon to follow. However, some products that are *trans* fat-free may still be high in saturated fat, calories or added sugars. Check the Nutrition Facts Panel on the food label for total fat, saturated fat and *trans* fat, as well as calories and other nutrients. Select foods that will fit into your healthy eating plan.

Why do some baked goods and snack foods contain trans fat?

In response to consumers' demand for foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol, food companies started replacing saturated fats with vegetable oils. Unfortunately, some vegetable oils didn't work well as an ingredient in many food products. For example, margarine would completely melt at room temperature and the quality of baked goods was not acceptable. The process of hydrogenating vegetable oil was developed to produce a food ingredient that functioned like saturated fat. However, this process also causes *trans* fats to form. Partially hydrogenated oils are the main dietary source of *trans* fat.

Most cooking oils in the supermarket labeled "vegetable oil" are actually soybean oil. Vegetable oil in its liquid form has no *trans* fats or cholesterol and is high in

polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Read the ingredient label on vegetable oils to see what type of oil it contains.

Soon food companies will be able to make products with soybean oil that does not require hydrogenation. Knowing that consumers are concerned about *trans* fats, the food industry, farmers and researchers are working to produce a new kind of soybean oil that can be used in food recipes without being hydrogenated. This oil is made from a new variety of soybeans that is currently under development. Using this new soybean oil will allow manufacturers to offer *trans* fat free foods while maintaining product quality.

Make smart decisions about the foods in your healthy eating plan

Learn the facts to make informed choices about the foods you eat. Use the Nutrition Facts label as a guide to making smart food choices. And, remember, a healthy eating plan is one that:

- Is low in saturated fats, *trans* fats, cholesterol, salt and added sugars.
- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts.