



Patient Education Handout Low Fat Diet General Information

If your provider has told you to lower the fats in your diet to improve your health, here is some information that can help you.

What is dietary fat? What counts as fat? Are some fats better than other fats? While fats are essential for normal body function, some fats are better for you than others. *Trans* fats, saturated fats and cholesterol are less healthy than polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats.

How much total fat do I need in my diet? Generally, for adults, no more than 20%-35% of total calories should come from fats. The USDA Food Guide () and DASH eating plan () are examples of healthy meal plans that can meet your calorie needs and provide the right amounts of fats.

Saturated Fat: You may have heard that saturated fats are the "solid" fats in your diet. For the most part, this is true. For example, if you open a container of meat stew, you will probably find some fat floating on top. This fat is saturated fat. Diets high in saturated fat have been linked to chronic disease, specifically, coronary heart disease. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 recommend consuming less than 10% of daily calories as saturated fat. Saturated fat can be found in the following foods:

- High-fat cheeses
- High-fat cuts of meat
- Whole-fat milk and cream
- Butter
- Ice cream and ice cream products
- Palm and coconut oils

It's important to note that lower-fat versions of these foods usually will contain saturated fats, but typically in smaller quantities than the regular versions. As you look at this list above, notice two things. First, animal fats are a primary source of saturated fat. Secondly, certain plant oils are another source of saturated fats: palm oils, coconut oils, and cocoa butter. You may think you don't use palm or coconut oils, but they are often added to commercially-prepared foods, such as cookies, cakes, doughnuts, and pies. Solid vegetable shortening often contains palm oils and some whipped dessert toppings contain coconut oil.

How can I decrease the saturated fat in my diet?

-Choose leaner cuts of meat that do not have a marbled appearance (where the fat appears embedded in the meat). Leaner cuts include round cuts and sirloin cuts. Trim all visible fat off meats before eating.

- Remove the skin from chicken, turkey, and other poultry before cooking.
- When re-heating soups or stews, skim the solid fats from the top before heating.
- Drink low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk rather than whole or 2% milk.
- Buy low-fat or non-fat versions of your favorite cheeses and other milk or dairy products.
- When you want a sweet treat, reach for a low-fat or fat-free version of your favorite ice cream or frozen dessert. These versions usually contain less saturated fat.

-Use low-fat spreads instead of butter. Most margarine spreads contain less saturated fat than butter. Look for a spread that is low in saturated fat and doesn't contain trans fats.

-Choose baked goods, breads, and desserts that are low in saturated fat. You can find this information on the Nutrition Facts label.

-Pay attention at snack time. Some convenience snacks such as sandwich crackers contain saturated fat. Choose instead to have non-fat or low-fat yogurt and a piece of fruit.

What are Trans Fats? You may have heard about *trans* fats recently in the news. So what's the story with *trans* fats? They can increase low-density lipoprotein *LDL-cholesterol* and decrease *high-density lipoprotein (HDL)* cholesterol risk factors for heart disease. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 recommend keeping the amount of *trans* fat you consume as low as possible.

How do I reduce trans fats in my diet?

-Look for the *Trans* fat listing on the Nutrition Facts label. Compare brands and choose the one lowest in *trans* fat, preferably with no *trans* fat.

-Replace margarine containing *trans* fat with unsaturated vegetable oil.

-If you use margarine, choose a soft margarine spread instead of stick margarine. Check your labels to be sure the soft margarine does contain less *trans* fat. If possible, find one that says zero grams of *trans* fat.

What about polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats? Most of the fat that you eat should come from unsaturated sources: polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats. In general, nuts, vegetable oils, and fish are sources of unsaturated fats. Examples are vegetable oils, olive oil, canola oil, sunflower oil, safflower oil, corn oil, avocados, walnuts, trout and salmon. Remember, any type of fat is high in calories.

What is dietary cholesterol? Cholesterol is a fatty substance that's found in animal-based foods such as meats, poultry, egg yolks, and whole milks. Do you remember the other type of fat that is found in animal-based products? That's right saturated fat. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005* recommend that individuals consume less than 300 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol each day. So, when you follow the tips to reduce your saturated fat intake, in most cases, you will be reducing your dietary cholesterol intake at the same time. For example, if you switch to low-fat and fat-free dairy products, you will reduce your intake of both saturated fat and cholesterol.

Additional Information:

For Coastal Health & Wellness Patients:

If you have any questions about this information, please discuss with your provider at your next healthcare appointment or call the Coastal Health & Wellness NurseLine at 409-938-2234.

Based on information from www.cdc.gov

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