

Nutrition FATS	PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT HEALTH & FITNESS M. P. 1-A03.03 01/1998-N Page 1 of 2
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TYPES

Contrary to popular belief, fat is an essential part of the diet. Fat is composed of “fatty acids”. There are three basic categories of fatty acids; Saturated, Monounsaturated, and Polyunsaturated. The fats and oils consumed in our diets have various percentages and combinations of these fatty acids. For instance, beef fat is composed of approximately 50% saturated fatty acids, 45% monounsaturated fatty acids, and 5% polyunsaturated. Because it is predominately saturated fatty acids it is referred to commonly as a saturated fat. The importance of this is based on the different impact each type of fatty acid has on the body.

Saturated

Saturated fatty acid is closely associated with higher serum cholesterol levels and heart disease. The easiest way to identify saturated fat is that they are of animal origin and are solid at room temperature.

Unsaturated

Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids do not affect serum cholesterol. Monounsaturated fatty acids are preferred generally over the polyunsaturated fatty acids. It should be noted that polyunsaturated fatty acid is further defined as either omega-3 or omega-6 fatty acids. Omega-3 is found mostly in fish and has been thought to reduce serum cholesterol. The unsaturated fats, on the other hand, generally have a vegetable origin and are liquid at room temperature.

FUNCTION

Fat serves several functions by providing essential fatty acids, serving as an energy source, providing for uptake of fat-soluble vitamins, and by making meals satisfying.

Fat also has a sinister side and has been linked to a rise in blood cholesterol levels that is a risk factor for arteriosclerosis. It also is associated with weight gain because of its high caloric contribution of nine calories per gram.

DIET RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a list of suggestions that can help reduce the intake of saturated fats and do not require radical changes to the diet.

- Select very lean meats and trim off the excess fat. If possible, avoid eating large amounts of red meat.
- Broil, bake or boil rather than fry foods, if frying is unavoidable, use the unsaturated fats, i.e., canola or olive oil.
- Try to increase the percentage of fish, poultry, mature beans and peas in the diet.
- Use only moderate amounts of eggs and organ meats, i.e., liver, heart, kidney.
- Reduce the intake of foods containing butterfat, i.e., butter, cream, ice cream, whole milk, cheese (unless otherwise specified).

Nutrition FATS	PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT HEALTH & FITNESS M. P. 1-A03.03 01/1998-N Page 2 of 2
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DIET RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

- Substitute soft-tub margarine for butter and stick margarine.
- Substitute skim or low-fat milk for whole milk.
- Avoid commercially fried foods.

RDA

Currently, it is recommended that saturated fat calories should not exceed ten percent of total caloric intake. Fat calories from unsaturated sources should not exceed twenty percent of total caloric intake.