

Have Your Fat and Eat it Too!

Over the years, fat has gotten a bad rep—everything from increasing the risk of heart disease to, well, making us fat. But more recently, experts have come to realize that there are good fats and bad fats, and that a certain amount of both kinds of fat is necessary for a healthy diet.

In fact, fat is an important natural component of human cell walls and the nervous system. It helps to keep us warm, protects our organs, and helps store and transport fat-soluble Vitamins A, D, E & K. Certain fats are needed for hormone production, neurological development, and possibly even disease prevention. As researchers at Boston College put it: “A body without fat would be like a house built without insulation, proper wiring, and sound structure.”

Very low-fat diets are not recommended for the average healthy individual

Most experts agree, fat also has an important role in satiety, in part because it's a great carrier of flavor. So eating food with some fat in it will not only help keep you healthy but it also helps keep you feeling full longer and may help prevent overeating. So-called “fat-free” products, in fact, may be just as high in calories as their full- or low-fat counterparts.

The trick is to choose the right kinds of fat in the first place and to replace saturated fats with healthier unsaturated fats.

GOOD AND BAD FATS

Good Fats

Polyunsaturated fats (PUFA)	Found in safflower, sesame, soy, corn, and sunflower-seed oils, nuts, and seeds
Monounsaturated fats (MUFA)	Olive, canola, peanut, and avocado oils

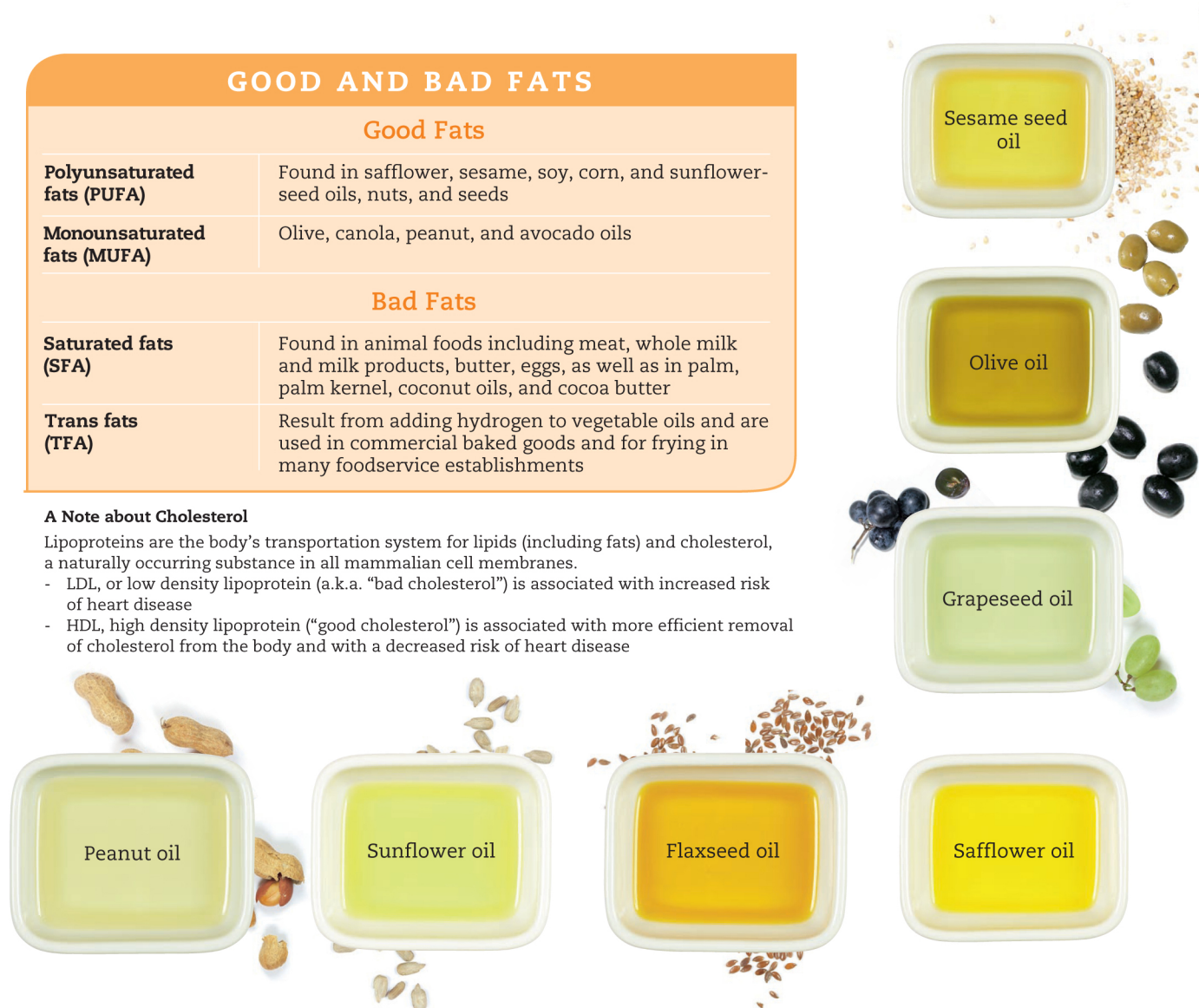
Bad Fats

Saturated fats (SFA)	Found in animal foods including meat, whole milk and milk products, butter, eggs, as well as in palm, palm kernel, coconut oils, and cocoa butter
Trans fats (TFA)	Result from adding hydrogen to vegetable oils and are used in commercial baked goods and for frying in many foodservice establishments

A Note about Cholesterol

Lipoproteins are the body's transportation system for lipids (including fats) and cholesterol, a naturally occurring substance in all mammalian cell membranes.

- LDL, or low density lipoprotein (a.k.a. “bad cholesterol”) is associated with increased risk of heart disease
- HDL, high density lipoprotein (“good cholesterol”) is associated with more efficient removal of cholesterol from the body and with a decreased risk of heart disease



Essential Fatty Acids (Omega-3s and Omega-6s)

Essential fatty acids, or EFAs, are fatty acids that can't be synthesized by the human body and must be derived from food sources. The two EFAs are: alpha-linolenic acid, an omega-3 fat (often designated as ω -3 or n-3) and linoleic acid, an omega-6 fat (ω -6 or n-6).

Good Sources of ω -3

Fatty fish, such as tuna and mackerel
Flaxseed oil
Walnuts, pecans and hazelnuts

Good Sources of ω -6

Poultry
Eggs
Avocado



There are more than a dozen different fats and oils commonly used in the American diet, ranging from familiar butter, canola oil, and olive oil to such specialty products as grapeseed oil and walnut oil. Each has its own flavor profile, uses and nutritional profile.

- All fats contain about the same number of calories (about 100 per table spoon), and are more than twice as energy-dense as protein and carbohydrates, so total fat must be managed in order to control total calorie intake
- The human body needs some saturated fats (up to 10% of calories in the body) for various functions, including hormone production

THE RIGHT FAT/OIL

Fat/oil	Roasting	Stewing/Braising	Sautéing	Grilling	Frying
Canola	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Olive	++	++	+++	+++	+
Sunflower	+++	+++	+++	+++	+
Safflower	–	+	+	–	–
Soybean	++	++	–	++	–
Butter	+	+++	+++	–	–
Shortening	+++	++	++	++	+++
Lard	+++	++	++	–	+++

+++ recommended – not recommended

Trans Fats

Trans fats, which have been shown to increase bad cholesterol and decrease good cholesterol, occur naturally in foods from ruminant animals (i.e. beef and dairy) and artificially in partially hydrogenated oils (such as some margarines, vegetable shortenings and other types of foods, including baked goods and many processed snack foods).

Easy Tips for Incorporating Better Fats in the Diet

- When sautéing, replace solid fats (such as butter and lard, which are generally higher in saturated fat) with liquid oil
- Serve bread with olive oil instead of butter—or consider another condiment, such as white bean puree
- Try to eat fish a minimum of twice a week, as a good source of omega-3 fats
- Olive oil, which is a rich source of antioxidant-rich polyphenols, is a key component of the healthful Mediterranean diet; use it whenever possible
- Look for partially hydrogenated oils (a source of trans fats) on ingredient lists – and avoid them
- Limit red meat in the diet and choose leaner protein sources (such as poultry and fish)
- Eat more plant foods, including grains, fruits, and vegetables

Make sure you use the right fat or oil for the job; those with higher smoke points (such as peanut oil, high oleic canola oil, and soybean oil) can be heated to a higher temperature, yielding better results without producing toxic chemicals.