Saturated Fat

Diets higher in saturated fat are associated with an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

What It Is

Saturated fat is found in higher proportions in animal products and is usually solid at room temperature. An exception is seafood, which is generally low in saturated fat.

The human body makes all the saturated fat that it needs, so it is not necessary to get saturated fat from food.

Where It Is Found

Saturated fat is found in a variety of foods, including:

- Beef fat (tallow and suet), chicken fat, pork fat (lard), and vegetable shortening
- Baked goods (such as brownies, cakes, cookies, doughnuts, pastries, and pies)
- Condiments, gravies, and salad dressings
- Dairy products (such as whole and 2% reduced-fat milk, cheese, and yogurt)
- Desserts (such as ice cream, other frozen desserts, and puddings)
- Meats and poultry
- Processed meats and poultry products (such as bacon, hot dogs, jerky, some luncheon meats, and sausages)
- Pizza
- Sandwiches (such as hamburgers, hot dogs, and submarine sandwiches)
- Snack foods (such as chips, crackers, microwave popcorn, and pretzels)
- Spreads (such as butter, stick margarine, cream cheese, and sour cream)
- Sweets (such as chocolate candies)
- Tropical plant oils (such as coconut, palm, and palm kernel oils)

What It Does

- Like all fats, saturated fat provides calories or “energy” for the body, helps the body absorb certain vitamins, and supports many body processes.
Health Facts

- Most Americans exceed the recommended limits for saturated fat in the diet.
- According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, there is evidence that diets in which unsaturated fats (especially polyunsaturated fats) are eaten in place of saturated fat and within the recommended daily limits for calories are associated with reduced blood levels of total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL or “bad”) cholesterol—which, in turn, are associated with a reduced risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in both men and women in the U.S.
- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend consuming less than 10% of calories per day from saturated fat. In addition, look for ways to replace saturated fat with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats when possible.

Action Steps

For Reducing Saturated Fat in Your Diet

Use the Nutrition Facts label as a tool for reducing consumption of saturated fat. The Nutrition Facts label on food and beverage packages shows the amount in grams (g) and the % Daily Value (%DV) of saturated fat per serving of the food.

The Daily Value for saturated fat is less than 20 g per day. This is based on a 2,000 calorie daily diet—your Daily Value may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

- Compare and choose foods to get less than 100% DV of saturated fat each day. And remember:
  - 5% DV or less of saturated fat per serving is considered low
  - 20% DV or more of saturated fat per serving is considered high
- Choose lean cuts of meats and poultry. Trim or drain fat from meats before or after cooking and remove poultry skin before eating.
- Try seafood and plant sources of protein (such as beans and peas, soy products, and unsalted nuts and seeds) in place of some meats and poultry.
- Substitute fat-free or 1% low-fat dairy products and fortified plant-based beverages (such as soy, rice, and almond) for whole and 2% reduced-fat dairy products.
- Switch from stick margarine to soft margarine (liquid, spray, or tub).
- Cook and bake with liquid oils (such as canola and olive oil) instead of solid fats (such as butter, lard, and shortening).
- Try baking, broiling, grilling, or steaming. These cooking methods do not add extra fat.
- Instead of creamy salad dressings (such as ranch and blue cheese), make your own flavorful dressings with vinegar and oil (such as flaxseed, olive, or sesame oils).
- Consume smaller portions of foods and beverages that are higher in saturated fat or consume them less often.
- When eating out, ask which fats are being used to prepare your meal. You can also ask if nutrition information is available and then choose options that are lower in saturated fat.