Total Fat

What It Is

Fat is found in foods from both plants and animals. Total Fat on the Nutrition Facts label includes:

- **Saturated fat** is found in higher proportions in animal products and is usually solid at room temperature.
- **Trans fat formed naturally** is found in small amounts in dairy products, beef, and lamb. **Trans fat formed artificially during food processing** is found in partially hydrogenated oils, which were used in a variety of foods, such as baked goods, coffee creamer, ready-to-use frostings, snack foods, and stick margarine. As of 2018, most uses of partially hydrogenated oils, the major source of artificial trans fat in the U.S. food supply, have been phased out. Trans fat is also present at very low levels in refined vegetable oils.
- **Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats** are found in higher proportions in plants and are usually liquid at room temperature as oils.

Where It Is Found

- **Saturated fat** is found in animal fats, baked goods, condiments, gravies, dairy products (whole and 2% reduced-fat), desserts, meats and poultry, processed meats and poultry products, pizza, salad dressings, snack foods, sandwiches, spreads, sweets, tropical plant oils, and vegetable shortening.
- **Trans fat formed naturally** is found in small amounts in dairy products, beef, and lamb. **Trans fat formed artificially during food processing** is found in partially hydrogenated oils, which were used in a variety of foods, such as baked goods, coffee creamer, ready-to-use frostings, snack foods, and stick margarine. As of 2018, most uses of partially hydrogenated oils, the major source of artificial trans fat in the U.S. food supply, have been phased out. Trans fat is also present at very low levels in refined vegetable oils.
- **Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats** are found in avocados, fish, mayonnaise and oil-based salad dressings, nuts, olives, seeds, soft margarines, and vegetable oils.

What It Does

- Fat provides calories, or “energy,” for the body. Each gram of fat provides 9 calories. Fat also stores energy in excess of what the body needs immediately and serves as a secondary energy source once calories from carbohydrates are used up.
- Fat is a basic part of cell membranes and is necessary for proper growth and development.
- Fat helps the body absorb important fat-soluble vitamins (vitamins A, D, E, and K).
- Fat supports key body processes, such as blood clotting, nervous system function, reproduction, and immune response.
- Fat plays a vital role in maintaining healthy skin and hair.
- Fat in food provides taste and consistency and helps you feel full.
Health Facts

- Dietary fat has more than **twice the calories** per gram as either carbohydrate or protein, so calories from fat can add up quickly.

- There is evidence that diets higher in saturated fat and trans fat are associated with increased levels of total cholesterol and/or low-density lipoprotein (LDL or “bad”) cholesterol—which, in turn, are associated with an **increased 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. The guidelines also recommend **keeping the intake of trans fat as low as possible** by limiting foods that are sources of artificial trans fat.

---

**Action Steps**

For Monitoring Total Fat in Your Diet

Use the **Nutrition Facts** label as a tool for monitoring consumption of total fat. The Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods and beverages shows the amount in grams (g) and the % Daily Value (%DV) of total fat per serving of the food.

The Nutrition Facts label also lists the types of fat that make up the total fat in a product. This includes the amount in grams (g) per serving of saturated fat and trans fat and the %DV of saturated fat. Food manufacturers may also **voluntarily** list the amount in grams (g) per serving of monounsaturated fat and polyunsaturated fat.

**The Daily Value for total fat is 78 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.

- When comparing and choosing foods, look at the %DV of total fat. And remember:
  - 5% DV or less of total fat per serving is considered low
  - 20% DV or more of total 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 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.
- 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, and steaming. These cooking methods do not add extra fat.
- Limit baked goods, desserts, fried fast foods, and snack foods.
- When eating out, ask which fats are being used to prepare your meal. You can also ask if nutrition information is available to help you make informed choices.