Saturated Fat

What It Is

Saturated fat is found in higher proportions in animal products and is usually solid at room temperature. The exceptions are seafood (which is low in saturated fat) and certain tropical plant oils, such as coconut oil, palm oil, and palm kernel oil (which are high in saturated fat).

The human body makes more saturated fat than 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, and pork fat (lard)
- Cream and milk (whole and 2% milk)
- Dairy products (such as butter and regular/full-fat cheese, cream cheese, and ice cream)
- Dairy desserts (such as ice cream, other frozen desserts, and puddings)
- Grain-based desserts (such as brownies, cakes, cookies, doughnuts, pastries, pies, and sweet rolls)
- Fast food
- Meats and poultry
- Nuts
- Processed meat and poultry products (such as bacon, hot dogs, jerky, luncheon meats, and sausages)
- Tropical plant oils (such as coconut, palm, and palm kernel oils)
- Savory snacks (such as chips, crackers, and microwave popcorn)
- Sweets (such as chocolate candies)
- Vegetable shortening and stick margarine

What It Does

Like all dietary fats, saturated fat provides calories and helps the body absorb certain vitamins, cushions and insulates the body, and supports many body processes.

Saturated fat can increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Saturated fat is a nutrient to get less of.
Health Facts

- Most Americans exceed the recommended limits for saturated fat in the diet.
- Saturated fat can raise the levels of total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL or "bad") cholesterol in the blood — which, in turn, can increase the 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 recommends consuming less than 10% of calories per day from saturated fat by replacing saturated fat with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats while staying within recommended limits for calories and total dietary fat.

Action Steps

For Reducing Saturated Fat in Your Diet

Use the Nutrition Facts Label as your tool for reducing consumption of saturated fat. The Nutrition Facts Label on food and beverage packages shows the amount in grams (g) and the Percent Daily Value (%DV) of saturated fat in one 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 diet — your Daily Value may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

- When comparing foods, choose foods with a lower %DV of saturated fat. The goal is to get less than 100% of the Daily Value for saturated fat each day. And remember:
  - 5% DV or less of saturated fat per serving is low
  - 20% DV or more of saturated fat per serving is high
- Look for sources of saturated fat on the ingredient list on a food package. Some examples of ingredients that contain saturated fat are: beef fat (tallow and suet), butter, chicken fat, cream, pork fat (lard), shortening, and tropical plant oils (such as coconut oil, palm oil, and palm kernel oil).
  - Tip: Ingredients are listed in descending order by weight — the closer an ingredient is to the beginning of the list, the more of that ingredient is in the food.
- Choose lean cuts of meats and poultry. Trim or drain fat from meats before or after cooking and remove poultry skin before cooking or 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 (skim) or low-fat (1%) dairy products (such as cheese, milk, and yogurt), or fortified soy beverages for regular/full-fat (whole) 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 using creamy salad dressings, make your own flavorful dressings with vinegar and oil (such as flaxseed, olive, or sesame oils).
- Limit dairy and grain-based desserts, savory snacks, and sweets (such as cakes, chips, chocolate candies, cookies, crackers, ice cream, and puddings).
- 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 request to see nutrition information (available in many chain restaurants), and then choose options that are lower in saturated fat.