

Fact sheet - fats

Fats

About a third of the fat the average British person eats comes from dairy products, mostly butter and milk. About a quarter comes from meat and meat products like sausages and meat pies. Another quarter comes in margarines, cooking fats and oils and about one sixth comes from other foods such as crisps, chocolates, biscuits and cakes. People are often confused about the different sorts of fats. There are basically 2 types - saturated fats (or saturates) and unsaturated fats. The unsaturated fats include a special group called polyunsaturated fats (or polyunsaturated). The difference is in their chemical make-up.

Saturates

Saturated fats are found as animal fats in meat (beef, lamb, pork, suet lard and dripping) and in dairy products like milk, cheese and butter. They are also found in some vegetable fats, such as coconut oil and palm oil and in cakes, biscuits, chocolates, cooking fats, hard margarines, sauces and puddings. Sometimes these fats are listed in the ingredients as hydrogenated vegetable fat/oil. There are health risks associated with a high fat intake. Fat is loaded with calories and too many calories can lead to obesity. Secondly, too much saturated fat is linked with a higher risk of heart disease. The more saturated fat you eat, the more cholesterol you get in your blood. The cholesterol builds up on the inside of the arteries, especially in the heart. Eventually the arteries can get completely blocked causing a heart attack. Unsaturated fats do not raise cholesterol in the same way as saturates and our bodies do need a small amount of polyunsaturated fats to help make and repair body cells. So, try to cut down on the total amount of fats you eat and when you do eat fats, choose ones high in polyunsaturates.

Polyunsaturates

Polyunsaturated fats are found in some vegetable oils like sunflower, corn or syrup oils, in special soft margarines labelled high in polyunsaturated, in nuts and oily fish such as herring, mackerel and trout.

How to eat less fat:

- choose a low fat spread or margarine that's high in polyunsaturates
- try using a low-fat yoghurt. Use single rather than double cream, crème fraiche/fromage frais
- eat the cheeses with the least fat, cottage cheese or low-fat varieties
- use fish, chicken and turkey more often and remove the skin
- eat the leanest meat you can afford and cut off any fat

- cut out crisps, chocolate, cakes and biscuits
- use skimmed or semi-skimmed rather than ordinary milk
- look for the fat content on your labels guidelines are no more than 4g per 100g