

# Trimming the Fat



Fats are nutrients that serve as a source of energy and essential fatty acids. Fats aid in the absorption of the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K. The recommended intake ranges for total fat are 20-35% of calories for adults, 25-35% for older children and teens, and 30-40% for children ages 1 to 3. While a certain amount of fat is necessary in the diet, overconsumption of fats can lead to an increased risk of obesity and chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease.

There are several different types of fatty acids. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids are mainly found in plant foods and seafood, and they are generally liquid at room temperature (oils). These are the preferred fat sources for the diet.

Saturated fatty acids, *trans* fatty acids, and cholesterol mainly come from animal sources, such as meats and dairy products, and are generally solid at room temperature (solid fats). The *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends that consumption of these types of non-essential fats be limited.

- **Saturated Fatty Acids** – High consumption of saturated fatty acids has been associated with increased cholesterol levels and greater risk for cardiovascular disease. Some of the major sources of saturated fatty acids in the American diet include regular cheese, pizza, desserts, chicken and chicken mixed dishes, sausage, franks, bacon, and ribs. It is recommended that saturated fatty acid intake be limited to less than 10% of total calories.

- **Trans Fatty Acids** - Consumption of *trans* fatty acids has also been linked to high cholesterol levels and risk of cardiovascular disease. *Trans* fatty acids are found naturally in some animal foods. Limit synthetic *trans* fatty acids created through hydrogenation found in margarines and processed snack foods.
- **Cholesterol** - High cholesterol consumption is associated with risk of cardiovascular disease. The main sources of cholesterol are eggs, chicken, and beef. It is recommended that individuals consume less than 300 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per day, or less than 200 mg for individuals at high risk for cardiovascular disease.

## Ways to Trim Fat in Meals

- Choose fat-free and low fat milk and dairy products over whole fat dairy products.
- Avoid fatty and highly processed meats such as sausage, bacon, and hot dogs.
- Limit consumption of bakery products such as pies, cakes, and cookies.
- Cook with oils instead of solid fats such as butter and lard.
- Use low fat cooking methods including baking, steaming, and grilling.

**Source:** U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2011). *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010* 7th Edition, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2010. <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/DietaryGuidelines/2010/PolicyDoc/PolicyDoc.pdf>

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www.olemiss.edu • Phone: 800-321-3054 • Fax: 800-321-3061