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## **UNDERSTANDING DIETARY FATS**

### Backgrounder

#### **Healthy Dietary Fat**

Studies show that one of the most effective ways to lower the risk of high cholesterol and heart disease is by replacing saturated and trans fats with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat in a healthy diet.<sup>i</sup>

#### **Saturated and Trans Fat**

Saturated and trans fats contribute to elevated blood cholesterol levels, which can lead to hardening of the arteries and increase the risk of heart disease.<sup>ii</sup> Replacing saturated and trans fat with “good” mono and polyunsaturated fats can help lower cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke.<sup>iii</sup>

**Saturated fat** raises total and LDL “bad” blood cholesterol levels and increases the risk of heart disease.<sup>iii</sup> Saturated fat is found in:

- Animal products like meat and full-fat dairy products such as butter and cream
- Fast foods and processed foods prepared with butter or hydrogenated oil

**Trans fat** has been shown to raise total and LDL “bad” blood cholesterol levels; it also lowers levels of HDL “good” cholesterol.<sup>iv</sup> Trans fat is found mostly in foods made with partially hydrogenated oil or shortening such as:

- Fast food
- Cookies
- Chips
- Crackers
- Baked goods
- Deep-fried food

#### **Monounsaturated and Polyunsaturated Fat**

Healthy dietary fat is a necessary part of our diet – studies have shown that “good” polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats may help lower blood cholesterol levels.<sup>v</sup> Consumers should always read nutrition labels and select products higher in polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats instead of saturated and trans fats.

**Monounsaturated fat** can help reduce LDL “bad” cholesterol levels. Monounsaturated fat is found in:

- Olive oil
- Canola oil
- Soft non-hydrogenated margarine made from these oils
- Mayonnaise made from these oils

**Polyunsaturated fat** can help reduce blood cholesterol levels and the risk of heart disease.<sup>vi</sup> Polyunsaturated fat is found in:

- Safflower oil
- Sunflower oil
- Corn oil
- Canola oil
- Soy oil
- Olive oil
- Soft non-hydrogenated margarine made from these oils
- Mayonnaise made from these oils

**Omega-3 polyunsaturated and Omega-6 polyunsaturated fats** are essential to the diet. Some omega-3 fats (DHA, EPA) have been shown to lower the risk of heart disease.<sup>vii</sup>

**There are three main omega-3 fats found in foods:**

- Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA)
  - ALA is an “essential” fat in the diet. This means that our bodies cannot produce ALA, therefore it is essential that we get ALA in our diet. Good sources of ALA include canola oil, walnuts, enriched eggs, flax, soft margarine and mayonnaise.<sup>viii</sup>
- Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) + Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)
  - EPA and DHA aid in the development and maintenance of cells in the brain, nerves and eyes. EPA and DHA also appear to protect against blood clotting, inflammation and other factors that contribute to reduced rates of heart disease.<sup>ix\_x</sup>

## **Serving Size**

- Canadians should get approximately 20-35 per cent of their daily calories from fat. This is approximately 45-75 grams of fat per day for women and 60 to 105 grams of fat per day for men.<sup>iii</sup>
- *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide*, recommends that Canadians aim to eat 30-45 mL or 2-3 tablespoons of unsaturated fat each day to get the fats they need. This amount includes oil used for cooking, salad dressings, margarine and mayonnaise. Choose soft margarines or vegetable oils that are low in saturated fats and trans fats instead of butter, hard margarine, coconut and palm oils, lard and shortening.

Canadians can learn about how to incorporate healthy fats into their everyday diet by visiting [www.healthyfats.ca](http://www.healthyfats.ca), a new website that will provide valuable dietary information about healthy fats.

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<sup>i</sup> Ronald P Mensink, Peter L Zock, Arnold DM Kester, and Martijn B Katan. Effects of dietary fatty acids and carbohydrates on the ratio of serum total to HDL cholesterol and on serum lipids and apolipoproteins: a meta-analysis of 60 controlled trials. *American Journal Clinical Nutrition* 2003 77: 1146-1155.

<sup>ii</sup> Dietitians of Canada Fact Sheet, Trimming the Canadian Diet.  
[http://www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat\\_well\\_live\\_well/english/faqs\\_tips\\_facts/fact\\_sheets/index.asp?fn=vi&id=1288&idstring=6747%7C6739%7C6611%7C6504%7C6592%7C6593%7C6594%7C6467%7C6038%7C6040%7C1159%7C5758%7C5760%7C5762%7C5764%7C5766%7C4021%7C4032%7C4033%7C2701%7C2719%7C1047%7C2528%7C1357%7C986%7C2318%7C2084%7C2088%7C2357%7C2540%7C1350%7C1349%7C1331%7C2537%7C2538%7C1022%7C1017%7C1427%7C2518%7C952%7C966%7C1293%7C2383%7C2384%7C2523%7C2524%7C1093%7C1035%7C2356%7C2519%7C2451%7C1426%7C2359%7C2324%7C1358%7C950%7C1267%7C1032%7C1092%7C1178%7C996%7C2358%7C2319%7C1151%7C2526%7C2520%7C1288%7C1201%7C1329%7C1102%7C1197%7C1198%7C2527%7C987%7C2546%7C2525%7C1082%7C1296%7C1070](http://www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat_well_live_well/english/faqs_tips_facts/fact_sheets/index.asp?fn=vi&id=1288&idstring=6747%7C6739%7C6611%7C6504%7C6592%7C6593%7C6594%7C6467%7C6038%7C6040%7C1159%7C5758%7C5760%7C5762%7C5764%7C5766%7C4021%7C4032%7C4033%7C2701%7C2719%7C1047%7C2528%7C1357%7C986%7C2318%7C2084%7C2088%7C2357%7C2540%7C1350%7C1349%7C1331%7C2537%7C2538%7C1022%7C1017%7C1427%7C2518%7C952%7C966%7C1293%7C2383%7C2384%7C2523%7C2524%7C1093%7C1035%7C2356%7C2519%7C2451%7C1426%7C2359%7C2324%7C1358%7C950%7C1267%7C1032%7C1092%7C1178%7C996%7C2358%7C2319%7C1151%7C2526%7C2520%7C1288%7C1201%7C1329%7C1102%7C1197%7C1198%7C2527%7C987%7C2546%7C2525%7C1082%7C1296%7C1070) Accessed on November 27, 2006.

<sup>iii</sup> The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, Fats Oils and Dietary Cholesterol.  
<http://ww2.heartandstroke.ca/Page.asp?PageID=33&ArticleID=5326&Src=living&From=SubCategory>  
Accessed on November 27, 2006.

<sup>iv</sup> Couillard, Jean-Pierre et al. Effects of Endurance Exercise Training on Plasma HDL Cholesterol Levels Depend on Levels of Triglycerides: Evidence From Men of the Health, Risk Factors, Exercise Training and Genetics (HERITAGE) Family Study. *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2001 21: 1226-1232.

<sup>v</sup> Carson, Jo Ann S. Nutrition Therapy for Dyslipidemia. *Current Diabetes Report*. 2003 Oct; 3(5):397-40.

<sup>vi</sup> Health Canada, Trans Fat. [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/gras-trans-fats/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/gras-trans-fats/index_e.html). Accessed on November 27, 2006.

<sup>vii</sup> Scott, Shanon Maintaining Conjugated Linoleic Acids (Clas's) in Pasture-Fed Beef.  
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<sup>viii</sup> Brenna, JT. Efficiency of conversion of [alpha]-linolenic acid to long chain n-3 fatty acids in man. *Clinical Nutrition and Metabolic Care*. 2002; 5:127-32.

<sup>ix</sup> Craig-Schmidt, M.C. Isomeric fatty acids. Evaluating status and implications for maternal and child health. *Lipids*. 2001; 36: 997-1006.

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<sup>x</sup> Valenzuela, A and Morgado, N. Trans fatty acid isomers in human health and in the food industry. *Biological Research*. 1999; 32:273-87.