

Choose high-quality fats

Definition and roles of fats

Fats (lipids) are one of three main families of macronutrients, along with proteins and carbohydrates. Although certain fats are less useful in terms of health, fat is indispensable for the proper working of the body, where it has two major roles:

- **Energy:** second energy substrate used by the body;
- **Structural:** becomes part of our cell membranes.

Also, fat helps the body absorb certain vitamins, called fat soluble (A, D, E and K), take part in many biological functions (hormones, transporting of molecules, etc.) and play a thermal insulation role (heat conservation).

The different fatty acids are synthesized by the body or provided by food. It is therefore possible to control part of your fat intake!



DID YOU KNOW?

The nervous system is the second-richest organ when it comes to lipids, after fatty tissue. Fats therefore play an essential role here.

Different types of fats

	ROLES	SOURCES
Saturated fats	When eaten to excess, saturated fatty acids increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. However, they are also essential elements of the brain and thus should not necessarily be demonized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal products (meats, deli meats, butter, cream, lard, whole milk products) • Palm, palm kernel and coconut oils, very common in commercially processed foods
Monounsaturated fats	Oleic acid, or omega-9, is the most common monounsaturated fatty acid in our diets. It plays a preventive role when it comes to cardiovascular disease.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olive oil • Avocado • Nuts
Polyunsaturated fats	Omega-3s are “essential” fatty acids, as our body cannot synthesize them: they must therefore be provided by food. They are needed for the optimal functioning of the body and are involved in cardiovascular, retina, brain and nervous system health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatty fish (mackerel, sardines, herring, salmon, etc.) • Some vegetable oils (canola, flaxseed, nut) • Nuts and flaxseeds • Some fruits and vegetables (broccoli, spinach, mango, lettuce)
	Omega-6s are also essential fatty acids and must therefore be provided by food. They have important functions in the body and can help in case of injury, but excess amounts can be harmful. In fact, they can compete with omega-3s and inhibit their optimal use. Also, their pro-inflammatory and clotting effects can increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain vegetable oils (soy, sunflower, peanut, grapeseed, corn) and margarine • Seeds (sunflower, sesame, pumpkin) and nuts • Meats and deli meats, eggs • Processed and fried products
Trans fats	Trans fats can be present naturally in certain foods derived from animals or produced industrially. At the industrial level, they are created through a technological process called “hydrogenation,” which is used to make solid a fat that was originally liquid at room temperature. This makes it easier to store and improves organoleptic ¹ qualities based on industry needs. However, studies show that excessive consumption of industrial trans fats increases the risk of cardiovascular disease.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural trans fats: beef, lamb, dairy products • Industrial trans fats: processed products (pastries, pizzas, quiches, etc.), some margarines

1. The term “organoleptic” means “affecting the sensory organs.” The organoleptic quality of foods influences how we experience food with our senses (sight, taste, smell and touch).⁸



GOOD TO KNOW: The omega-6 / omega-3 ratio

Today, health authorities think that our omega-3 intake is too low, while our omega-6 needs are largely met through food. In fact, the modern diet, which contains a lot of industrial products and intensively farmed animals (fed by corn, sunflower and soy meal containing mostly omega-6s) results in an imbalance in the omega-6/omega-3 ratio. This imbalance can contribute to an increase in the risk of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancers and inflammatory diseases.

How can you make better choices when it comes to the fats you eat?

- **Vary the sources of fats.** They have different nutritional qualities based on their fatty acid composition.
- **Prioritize your intake of omega-3s** by eating fatty fish, vegetable oils (canola and nut) and nuts as well as omega-9s with olive oil.
- **Limit your intake of saturated fats** by limiting red meat and deli meats² and choosing other sources of protein: lean skinless meats, fish, eggs or vegetable substitutes. Do not use butter and cream in cooking, and consume them in small quantities.
- **Opt for home-cooked foods** to control the quantity and quality of added fats, and limit your intake of processed products as much as possible.
- **Use a measuring spoon to measure the amount of oil** you use in cooking.
- **Use cookware with a non-stick coating** so little or no fat is needed for cooking.
- **Branch out and try different cooking methods;** some do not need oil added (steamed, in foil, grilled, etc.). This also allows you to reinvent your favourite dishes and discover new flavours!

²To reference this tool: Global-Watch. (2022). *Choose high-quality fats*, available at www.global-watch.com.

2. Overconsumption of deli meats is associated with an increased risk of colorectal cancer, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.