



## I Hope You Get Fat

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Thank goodness that dietary fat isn't the boogie nutrient that it was a decade ago. As fat became the enemy and a swarm of lowfat and nonfat foods crowded grocery store shelves, something interesting happened – Americans got 30% bigger and mass confusion reigned. We started consuming these highly processed goodies with wild abandon, unaware of or simply disregarding the fact that they have significantly more sugar and only slightly fewer calories than their original counterparts.

Fat is a wonderful source of energy and this is why our bodies are designed to store it easily. One of our ancestors' primary goals in life was to have a stockpile of energy easily accessible when food was scarce. Also, cold weather led to times when even gathering roots posed a challenge. Under these circumstances, fat could also be used as insulation.

Given that we now reside in a food-on-demand culture, we don't experience the natural cycle of scarcity that allows us to burn excess body fat. Couple this with not achieving nearly the level of physical activity of our forebears, and we have become a society of overweight and unhealthy folks.

It's not difficult to understand how this explosion in our collective weight occurred. Fat is what helps us feel full and satisfied. Without it, there is no real feeling of satiation, and before we know it, we've eaten that whole box of SnackWells, along with about 800 calories and a host of highly processed non-nutrients. And on go the pounds.

Furthermore, we need fat to burn fat. That's right. Fat balances blood sugar by slowing the release of carbohydrates into our system and levels the ratio of two hormones, insulin to glucagon, which is critical for giving stored fat the heave-ho.

Now before you stop reading this article and rush out for your pint of Ben and Jerry's, consider that the quantity and type of fat you eat is important. According to Dr. Andrew Weil, M.D. and founder of the Program in Integrative Medicine in Arizona, "Fat does matter, both in terms of its contribution to total calories and, especially, in terms of its chemical nature. Many North Americans are eating too many calories, and high-fat foods account for a lot of the excess. In addition they are eating the wrong kinds of fats – too many of the bad ones and too few of the good ones."

The right kind of fat is an essential macronutrient that our bodies need (the other two being protein and carbohydrates). There are two kinds of natural fats, saturated and non-saturated. Saturated fats are solid fats found in milk, cheese, meat, lard, and tropical oils such as palm kernel and coconut. Non-saturated fats are found in vegetable, fish, nut, and seed oils and are divided into two categories: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Monounsaturated fats include olives and olive oil, avocados, cashews, almonds, peanuts, and canola oil. Polyunsaturated fats are found in fish, vegetable oils (corn, sesame, sunflower and safflower), and botanicals (evening primrose and borage).

# HEALTHFUL ELEMENTS



Saturated fats have been disparaged in the press as villainous foods that should be banished from the diet. According to Dr. Mary Enig, Ph.D. and nutritionist and biochemist internationally renowned for her research on the nutritional aspects of fats and oils, "The idea that saturated fats cause heart disease is completely wrong, but the statement has been 'published' so many times ... that it is very difficult to convince people otherwise unless they are willing to take the time to read and learn what all the economic and political factors were that produced the anti-saturated fat agenda."

According to Ann Louise Gittleman, Ph.D., Clinical Nutritionist and Certified Nutritional Specialist, "Saturated fats play a positive role in the human body. They provide a good source of stored energy, they cushion the organs against shock, and they insulate vital tissues against the cold."

Still, overindulging in saturated fats can adversely affect your health by blocking absorption of essential fatty acids found in non-saturated fats. It's important to know that dining out can contribute to overconsumption of hidden saturated fat. According to Ms. Gittleman, "We tend to overeat saturated fats not because we are eating too many fresh, thick steaks but because we unwittingly eat fats that are separated from the original food sources and used in a variety of ways in commercial food production."

There are two major types of essential fatty acids (EFAs), omega-3 and omega-6 oils. Virtually all of our body's systems rely on EFAs. These important acids also produce prostaglandins, which regulate our immune, central nervous, digestive, cardiovascular, endocrine, and reproductive systems.

The real villain here is trans fat, an unnatural vegetable fat from hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils such as vegetable shortening, margarine, and soybean oil. Natural vegetable oil has many nutrients, but the high temperatures required to convert it into these nasty non-foods destroy them and create trans fat. What is shocking is that the molecular structure of most trans fat is one molecule away from being *plastic*. Don't eat it!

Foods highest in trans fat are commercially baked goods such as bread, muffins, cookies, cakes, donuts, and pies. Another popular form of trans fat is partially hydrogenated soybean oil. Because of its long shelf life, it is a favorite among manufacturers of processed food, including fast food joints and other less healthful restaurants. So ask questions when dining out and read those nutritional labels.

It is these malicious trans fats that are associated with obesity, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and immune system suppression because of the oxidation that occurs during processing. Oxidation causes the formation of free radicals, or unstable molecules, which are the prime causes of these diseases. Eating oxidized foods also lowers good (HDL) cholesterol and raises bad (LDL) cholesterol.

So, you see, the answer is not to eat less fat. Have no fear, good fats are not the demise of our health and waistlines. Whether you're trying to shed pounds or thwart heart disease, good quality fats should not be avoided and are critical for good health. Incorporating healthy fats like fish, nuts, quality dairy, avocados, and oils into your meals will help you eat less, lose weight and feel fantastic.

# HEALTHFUL ELEMENTS



## **saturated fat sources:**

- milk
- cheese
- meat
- palm kernel oil  
coconut oil
- lard

## **non-saturated fat sources come in two forms:**

### **monounsaturated**

- olives and olive oil
- avocados
- cashews
- almonds
- peanuts
- canola oil

### **polyunsaturated**

- fish (halibut, mackerel, salmon)
- corn oil
- sesame oil
- sunflower oil
- safflower oil
- evening primrose oil

## **non-saturated fats provide essential fatty acids, omega-3 and omega-6:**

### **omega-3**

- flax seeds
- pumpkin seed oil
- canola
- walnuts
- hemp seeds
- fish (salmon, mackerel, anchovy, tuna, sardine)
- wild game
- algae

### **omega-6**

- unprocessed, unheated vegetable oils (sesame, corn, sunflower, safflower)
- evening primrose oil
- borage oil