



# Choose healthy fats.

**CHALLENGE**  
Replace  
saturated and  
trans fats with  
healthy fats.

## Requirements to Complete this WELLNESS CHALLENGE

1. Use this month's **Wellness Challenge** to learn how to eat the right kinds of fats for best health.
2. On your Wellness Challenge Calendar, record each day you avoid saturated and trans fat foods and choose healthy fats (e.g., trans-fat-free margarine, oils, nuts, etc.)
3. Read "Not all fats are the same" and "How to eat healthier fats."
4. To complete the Challenge, you must choose healthy fats in place of saturated and trans fats on at least 22 days this month.
5. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

## Not all fats are the same

Most of what you hear today is, "Eat a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet." While it is true that many fats are detrimental to health, a growing body of research shows that the important consideration is the kind of fat you eat.

For example, the Women's Health Initiative Dietary Modification Trial showed that eating a low-fat diet for 8 years did not prevent heart disease, breast cancer, or colon cancer, and didn't do much for weight loss, either. What did make a difference was choosing good fats (i.e., unsaturated fats) and avoiding bad fats (i.e., saturated and trans fats).

### Bad fats...

When you think of fat, most likely you picture the fat you can see around steak, ribs, or other cuts of meat or the fat under the skin of chicken. You might also think of butter, ice cream, or margarine.

These fats are typically referred to as "bad" fats because they raise the risk for disease. **Bad fats include both saturated fats and trans fats.**



**Saturated fats** raise cholesterol levels and the risk of heart disease. They come primarily from animal sources: fatty meats, whole-fat dairy products (e.g., butter, cream), poultry skin, egg yolks, lard, and shortening. They are also found in some plant foods, including coconut, coconut oil, palm oil, and palm kernel oil. You need to avoid these fats for good heart health.

**Trans fats** are rare in unprocessed foods but are formed when vegetable oils are "hydrogenated" or turned into a solid fat such as hard stick margarine or shortening. Trans fats are also found in processed foods made with partially hydrogenated vegetable oils such as vegetable shortenings, some margarines (especially margarines that are harder), crackers, candies, cookies, snack foods, deep-fried foods, and commercially baked goods.

Trans fats have a double detrimental affect on the health. They raise LDL cholesterol levels (the "bad" cholesterol) and lower the protective HDL particles in the blood. They also contribute to inflammation linked to diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. Even small amounts can significantly increase the rate of heart attacks.

The U.S. government now requires trans fat to be listed on food labels. However, a product containing up to half a gram of trans fat can claim to have zero. In Canada, the standard for zero is under 0.2 grams. If you want to be sure you eliminate all trans fat from your diet, you'll want to read the ingredient list. If it says "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" or "vegetable shortening," it contains a minimal amount of trans fat and you might want to buy something else.

### Good fats...

There is a group of fats that protect health. These fats contain "essential fatty acids," are a major source of energy for the body, and aid in the absorption of vitamins A, D, E, and K and carotenoids (the natural fat-soluble pigments found in certain plants). The main essential fatty acids are omega-3 and omega-6. Because your body cannot make them, you must get them from dietary sources.

**Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats** lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease. In large research studies, men and women who ate the most unsaturated fat had the lowest mortality from heart disease. These fats are protective and come primarily from vegetable oils. The best sources of unsaturated fats are vegetable oils (e.g. olive, soy, canola) and those found in whole foods such as nuts,



unprocessed nut butters, seeds, olives, and avocados. These foods are naturally rich in unsaturated fats but also contribute vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber. While these fats include the essential fatty acids, they are still high in calories so should be used moderately.



### Fat and weight

Just as you need to pay attention to the kind of fat you eat, you also need to think about how much fat you eat. Eating too much fat, even good fat, provides excess calories. One table-spoon of fat – no matter the type – contains about 120 calories. The Institute of Medicine recommends that for optimum health you keep your fat intake between 20% and 35% of total daily calories, with less than 7% (5% or less is ideal) coming from saturated fats.

### How to eat healthier fats

You can easily avoid bad fats and eat more good fats by eating a primarily plant-based diet consisting of fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads and cereals, legumes (e.g., peas, beans, lentils, garbanzos, and soybeans, including tofu, and other soy products), nuts, seeds, and non-hydrogenated vegetable oils. These foods are cholesterol-free, have no animal fats, are high in essential fatty acids, and, other than vegetable oils, are high in dietary fiber.

You don't necessarily have to give up a favorite food to eat a healthy diet. For example, you can replace an unhealthy fat with a healthier one when cooking. If your recipe calls for shortening, substituting half as much oil and a pinch of salt often yields similar results. When you eat a food that is high in saturated fat or cholesterol, balance it with foods that are low in saturated fat and cholesterol at other times of the day.

### Here are some ideas you can try:

- **In place of butter use spreads** such as hummus and nut butters, trans-fat-free margarines, and olive oil and garlic.
- **Season with herbs**, spices, lemon juice, and fat-free or low-fat salad dressings made with pure vegetable oils.
- **Always use oil** in place of all-animal fats and solid fats such as shortening. Good vegetable oils include olive, canola, soy, and most other oils made from seeds.
- **Limit commercial baked goods** (e.g., cookies, pastry, crackers). Make your own home-baked treats using a non-hydrogenated vegetable oil. (*Note: Because of the calories, you should eat desserts sparingly – even when made with healthier fats.*)
- **Choose healthier snacks** such as an apple, orange, nuts, seeds, or fresh veggies instead of typical snack foods such as chips.
- **Avoid deep-fried foods.** Instead, bake, steam, boil, broil, or microwave your food. Many vegetables (and fruits, of course) are delicious raw. If you do fry foods, use healthier fats, unhydrogenated vegetable oils such as olive, soy, or Canola oils.
- **Limit your consumption of red meats** such as sausages, salami, hot dogs, steak, hamburgers, and cold cuts.
- If you can, **cook your meals “from scratch”** to eliminate unwanted bad fats. If you must buy packaged foods, check the Nutrition Facts Label to see how much fat and saturated fat are in a serving and choose foods that are lower in these.
- **Choose lean fish**, skinless poultry, and other protein-rich foods such as beans. Use meats labeled “lean” or “extra lean” and trim visible fat from meat. Limit to small portions.
- **Choose nonfat or low-fat milk**, yogurt, and other dairy products or fortified soymilk.
- **Limit butter, gravy, and sauces** made with animal or solid fats.
- **Nuts, olives, seeds, and avocado** are good sources of healthy fat.



### The fat-cholesterol connection

The type of fat you eat can significantly impact cholesterol levels. In fact, **saturated fats raise cholesterol levels more than dietary cholesterol.** Saturated fats stimulate your body to produce LDL cholesterol (the “bad” cholesterol).

Dietary cholesterol comes from animal sources such as egg yolks, meat (especially organ meats such as liver), poultry, fish, and full-fat dairy products. Many of these foods are also high in saturated fats. Choosing foods with less cholesterol and saturated fat will help lower your blood cholesterol levels. These foods include fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and whole-grain breads and cereals.

#### Resources:

1. National Institutes of Health. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. *Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes Diet.*
2. Women's Health Initiative Randomized Controlled Dietary Modification Trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association.* Feb. 8, 2006.
3. Harvard School of Public Health. *Nurses' Health Study. 1999. and Health Professionals Follow-Up Study. 2005.*
4. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *Eating for a Healthy Heart.*





# Choose healthy fats.

### Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record each day you actually eat healthier fats and avoid “bad” fats.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you substituted good fats for bad fats. You must meet this goal at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. Then keep up this healthy practice for a lifetime of good health.
4. Turn in your Wellness Challenge form if requested, or enter your completion of this Challenge on the Health Activity Tracker report for the month, if applicable. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

**CHALLENGE**  
 Replace saturated and trans fats with healthy fats.

MONTH: _____							WC = Wellness Challenge	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>		
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		
WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>		
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		
WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>		
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		
WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>	WC <input type="checkbox"/>		
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this week I ate healthy fats

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking

**Other wellness projects completed this month:**

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

