



Cooking with less fat

We all need some fat in our diet to help provide energy, some essential fats that our bodies cannot make and to help us obtain and absorb the fat soluble vitamins A, D, E and K.

A healthy fat intake is based on your energy needs and activity levels. An average man requires around 2,500 calories (kcal) per day and average woman 2,000 calories (kcal) per day. No more than 30% of these calories should come from fat. For most men that means not more than 95g of fat per day and for women no more than 70g fat.

There are 3 main types of fat, saturated, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated and most foods contain a mixture of these three. Some foods however are richer in one kind of fat than another.

Saturated fat:

Usually solid at room temperature and generally of animal origin.

Foods rich in saturated fats include:

- Butter, ghee, lard, hard margarines and foods made from these (cakes, biscuits, puddings, Indian sweets, pies, pastries and pasties)
- Dairy fats (full cream milk, cheese, full fat yoghurt, crème fraiche and cream)
- Fatty meats and meat products (sausages, burgers, salami)
- Palm and coconut oils

Monounsaturated fats:

Usually liquid at room temperature and vegetable origin.

Foods rich in mono unsaturated fats include:

- Olive oil, rapeseed oil and spreads based on these
- Avocado
- Nuts, flaxseed

Polyunsaturated fats:

Usually liquid at room temperature and vegetable origin.

Foods rich in polyunsaturated fats include:

- Corn, safflower and sunflower oil and spreads based on these
- Oily fish such as pilchards, sardines, salmon, trout, herring and mackerel
- Sunflower and other edible seeds

Lowering saturated fat intake

It is generally thought that reducing saturated fat intake can bring about a reduction in LDL (bad) cholesterol.

Be aware – it is easy to consume 10g of saturated fat

Here are some examples of 10g of saturated fat:

- 4 teaspoons butter (20g)
- 3 teaspoons ghee (15g)
- 3 sausages (125g)
- 1 medium Cornish pasty (170g)
- 2/3 small doner kebab
- 1 average lamb chop/cutlet (80g)
- ¾ average cheese and pickle sandwich
- 1 ½ matchbox sized pieces cheddar
- 1 choc ice

Guidance in the UK recommends lowering saturated fat intake to less than 10% of energy intake.

	Men	Women
Average energy needs	2500	2000
Fat (no more than)	95g	70g
Saturated fat (no more than)	30g	20g

If you need to lose weight, you may need to reduce your fat intake further, since all sources of fat are a concentrated source of calories. See our factsheet on **losing weight**.

The following are a few simple measures that can help to reduce your fat intake when preparing foods:

(For South Asian dishes see our factsheet on **South Asian diet and cholesterol**)

Cooking methods

- It is best to steam, boil, poach, grill, bake, casserole, microwave or stir fry foods. Use these methods instead of frying. Add only small quantities of oil when cooking and choose healthier oils (such as olive and rapeseed) that are high in unsaturated fat
- Try cooking using an oil-water spray. Fill a small plastic spray bottle with seven-eighths water and one-eighth oil of your choice. Use your oil-water spray when cooking under the grill, in a griddle pan, in a frying pan or in roasting pans before adding foods. Don't forget to shake well before use. These oil/water sprays are also available from supermarkets

Meat

- Use the leanest cuts possible and trim any visible fat/skin before cooking
- When grilling or roasting meat, use a trivet which allows the fat to drain away

Dairy

- Try substituting low fat yoghurt, fromage frais or crème fraîche in recipes that call for cream
- Avoid using high fat cheeses. If you do occasionally use cheese in a recipe use small quantities of a stronger cheese or opt for a lower fat variety
- Use semi-skimmed or skimmed milk instead of full cream milk

Starchy foods

- Experiment with continental wholegrain breads. They are rich in flavour and do not need much spread
- Oven chips are much lower in fat than traditional chips but only have them occasionally

Fruit and vegetables

- Be aware that some vegetables will soak up more oil than other vegetables. Partially replace some of the oil that you would have used with small amounts of water when cooking these types of vegetables
- Use vegetable purees to thicken sauces
- Tinned tomatoes are versatile and make a good basis for many sauces and casseroles

Oils, spreads, sauces, dressings and snacks

- If using oil, you may find it useful to measure it out using a teaspoon/tablespoon rather than just pouring it into the saucepan (use as little as possible).
- Although reduced fat spreads have less fat than butter or margarine, make sure you don't use twice as much
- Try to avoid spreading fat on chapattis and do not add oil or ghee to the chapatti dough
- Cut down on all deep fried snacks such as crisps, chevda, sev, samosas, puris, pakoras and chips - they are all high in fat and calories. Snacks such as samosas can be lightly brushed with oil and then baked or grilled rather than being deep-fried
- Replace creamy salad dressings with those made from plain low-fat yoghurt or low calorie/low fat ones
- Avoid recipes that call for a lot of fat or oil or use high fat ingredients e.g. Yorkshire puddings, pastry, creamy sauces