

NOTES ABOUT GOOD AND BAD FATS

First Some Myth-Busting

Fat in the diet is essential and it does NOT directly make fat and or cholesterol. The problem is that today's diet has too much of the wrong types of fat and an imbalance in the different types of good fat.

Good fats are essential for the proper functioning of EVERY cells in your body ! These are fats from oils, seeds, nuts, avocados and oily fish. Even saturated fat found in coconut, dairy and animal fat is NOT bad per se, and sensible levels will not lead to weight-gain - unlike eating excess carbohydrates.

However a word of warning, eating lots of fats AND carbohydrates, e.g. drizzling copious amounts of olive oil on pasta or spreading large amounts of butter on bread, is not a good idea because your body will first use glucose from the carbohydrate for energy rather than the fat. The excess fat ingested will be metabolised and laid down as yet more fat in fat stores and arteries and contribute to raised cholesterol and triglycerides (fat in the blood).

Some Good and Bad Fats:

Omega 3's - These fats are great for your body and your heart and are involved in many healthy chemical reactions (including fat burning) in the body. They include ALA (alpha linolenic acid), EPA (eicosapentanoic acid) and DHA (docosahexanoic acid). EPA and DHA are found in oily fish and ALA is found in flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds and walnuts.

Omega 6's - These are good for the body in small amounts only. They include LA (linoleic acid), GLA (gamma linolenic acid) and AA (arachidonic acid). Some Omega 6's are necessary, e.g. Borage or Evening Primrose oil for PMT, eczema and dry skin etc but we generally over consume these on a regular basis.

Omega-9's – Omega 9's such as Oleic acid are important to the body and lower the risk of a heart attack, arteriosclerosis, and aid in cancer prevention. Common sources of Oleic acid are avocado, Macadamia nuts, almonds and olive oil.

Hydrogenated Fats - These are processed or chemically altered fats that have changed their chemical structure to give a longer, more stable shelf life or better consistency to processed foods. Trans-fats a particularly unhealthy form of hydrogenated fat is common in fried foods and bakery products these are best avoided as they significantly contribute to heart diseases by raising the bad types of cholesterol (LDL - low-density lipoproteins) and triglycerides (fats in the blood), and lowering good cholesterol (HDL's).

What happens if I'm Deficient in the Good Ones?

A balance of all three oils (Omega 3, 6, 9) is necessary for the proper function of the body, but our highly processed, modern diet, gives us a much higher percentage of Omega 6's than Omega 3's and Omega 9's.

Omega 3 deficiency signs include inflammatory related health problems such as high, blood lipids, allergies, asthma, arthritis, water retention, dry skin and/or hair (dandruff), eczema, excessive sweating and/or thirst, poor memory, poor concentration and/or learning difficulties – quite a list!

Omega 6 deficiency signs include dry skin, eyes and hair (or dandruff), eczema, excessive sweating and/or thirst and pre-menstrual syndrome or breast pain. Deficiencies can often be countered by taking a supplement of Evening Primrose Oil or Borage Oil which is a really good source of Omega 6's (GLA's).

Some things to do:

To increase your intake of Omega 3's eat oily fish and Omega 3 eggs. Good fish are salmon, sardines, mackerel, herring, and anchovies. Tuna/shark/marlin/swordfish are good too, but don't eat more than once a fortnight because most of these fish have a high concentration of mercury.

Also try having flaxseeds (also called linseeds), pumpkin seeds and walnuts as snacks or in yoghurt, using walnut and flaxseed oil on salads and eating dark green veggies that have a higher Omega 3 content such as romaine lettuce, rocket and Swiss chard.

Avoid or reduce your intake of oils such as polyunsaturated sunflower, safflower, soya and corn oil which are high in Omega 6's.

To ensure you get the right balance of oils - only use Extra Virgin Olive Oil (full of Omega 9's) for cooking and dressings. Goose and duck fat is higher in Omega 9 oils so can also be used for cooking – as in the Perigord region of France, where the highest longevity in France is found. Butter can also be used in cooking, but do not let it burn – adding some olive oil to the pan too will help prevent this. Eating nuts and seeds such as sunflower seeds will give you some Omega 6 oils.

Avoid manufactured food particularly fried and baked food high in trans-fats. Trans Fatty Acids are implicated in creating diseases in the body such as cancer and cardio-vascular disease.

Cut out the starchy carbohydrates. Then you can eat sensible levels of (good) fats with no problem, as they will not have an adverse affect on your health or weight. In fact over time, you will lose fat from fat stores and also from arteries, thereby helping to reduce levels of hypertension, cholesterol, etc. This is why people on low starch diets sometimes report that their levels of triglycerides, cholesterol and blood pressure drop significantly.