



Meal Planning

A well balanced supply of essential nutrients is needed for health and well being. Healthy eating begins with careful meal planning. Daily menus should include a well rounded balance of fats, proteins and carbohydrates.

When planning nutritionally balanced meals for the holiday, start by reducing the use of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol. Reducing "unhealthy" fat content decreases the risk of heart disease, obesity, certain chronic conditions, some cancers or high blood pressure. It also reduces unnecessary calories that do little to nothing for health and well being. Reducing fats can be done easily, and often with little or no difference in taste. For instance, instead of butter or margarine, use a small amount of olive oil.

Reduce or Avoid Unhealthy Fats

Eating some fats are important for health. Healthy skin and hair are maintained by fat. Fat helps in the absorption and transport through the bloodstream of the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K. Fatty acids provide the raw materials that help in the control of blood pressure, blood clotting, inflammation, and other body functions.

Fat serves as the storage substance for the body's extra calories. It fills the cells that help insulate the body. Fats are also an important energy source. When the body has used up the calories from carbohydrates, which occurs after the first 20 minutes of exercise, it begins to depend on the calories from fat. (This is a good reason to exercise more than 20 minutes a day!)

Eating the healthy fats and avoiding the unhealthy fats can improve health and longevity. There are three types of fat:

1. Saturated fats are found in animal products, and are the biggest dietary cause of "bad cholesterol which increases the risk of heart disease." These saturated fats are linked to increasing the risk for heart disease and obesity.

- Butter
- Cheese
- Whole milk
- Ice cream
- Cream
- Fatty meats
- Vegetable oils including coconut oil, palm oil, palm kernel oils

As a good measure, avoid or limit any foods that are high in saturated fat (more than 20% on the nutrition food label.)

2. Unsaturated fats: Unsaturated fats help to lower blood cholesterol if used in place of saturated fats. These fats have a lot of calories, so they need to be limited. There are two types of unsaturated fats:

- a. **Mono-unsaturated fats:** Examples are olive and canola oils.
- b. **Polyunsaturated fats:** Examples include safflower, sunflower, corn, and soybean oils.

While unsaturated fats are a better choice than saturated fats, a large intake of polyunsaturated fat may increase the risk for some types of cancer. Reducing daily fat intake is not a guarantee against developing cancer or heart disease, but it does help reduce the risk factors.

3. Trans fatty acids: These fats form when vegetable oil hardens (a process called hydrogenation). Trans-fatty acids are found in fried foods, commercial baked goods (donuts, cookies, crackers), processed foods, and margarines.

Foods made with hydrogenated oils such as butter and margarine should be avoided because they contain high levels of trans fatty acids, which are linked to heart disease. These fats raise LDL levels. They can also lower HDL levels ("good cholesterol").

A good rule of thumb is to

- Limit total fat intake to 25% to 35% of total daily calories.
- Less than 7% of daily calories should be from saturated fat.
- Not more than 10% should be from polyunsaturated fat.
- Not more than 20% from monounsaturated fat.