

Straight Facts about Fat and Cholesterol



In the fight against disease, fat and cholesterol have been the "enemy" for years. There's no doubt that eating too much fat can contribute to health problems, like heart disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity. However, fat and cholesterol both have important functions in your body. The key is to find the right balance of foods to maximize your health. Here are some important facts about fat and cholesterol.

In Foods

Dietary cholesterol is found only in animal foods, like meat, poultry, fish, milk and eggs. Nutrition experts recommended a cholesterol intake of 300 milligrams or less per day.

Saturated fat is a type of fat found in meat, poultry, cheese, butter and coconut oil. Foods high in saturated fats are usually solid at room temperature. Since your body can manufacture cholesterol from saturated fat, eating less can help reduce your risk of heart disease.

Monounsaturated fats are found in oils (olive, canola and peanut), avocados, most nuts and some margarines. Often called "good " fats, they help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol without reducing levels of HDL (good) cholesterol.

Polyunsaturated fats are found in corn, safflower, sunflower, and soybean oils as well as most margarines and seafood. They tend to lower both good and bad blood cholesterol. One specific type, called omega-3 fatty acids, may be especially helpful in reducing the risk of chronic diseases. Fatty fish and flaxseed are high in omega-3s.

Trans-fatty acids seem to be double trouble, lowering HDL and raising LDL at the same time. Trans-fats are found in margarine, fast-food fries, crackers, cookies, pastries and other baked foods.

In Your Body

Blood (serum) cholesterol is the number called "total cholesterol" on lab tests. Your liver makes most of this cholesterol; while a small amount is absorbed from the foods you eat. Your body uses cholesterol to produce bile and hormones and to synthesize vitamin D. The cholesterol you eat has only a minimal effect on the cholesterol found in your blood. In your blood, cholesterol moves around in different forms, some of which affect your risk of disease.

HDL Cholesterol is often called "good " cholesterol. High HDL cholesterol levels are associated with a lower risk of heart disease - since this cholesterol is on its way out of your body.

LDL cholesterol, often-labeled "bad" cholesterol, is the most common type of cholesterol found in the blood. High LDL levels can cause cholesterol to stick to artery walls, forming a "plaque." This cholesterol buildup can eventually clog arteries, causing heart disease or stroke.

Triglycerides are another name for the fats found in food and in your blood. High triglyceride levels can also cause health problems.

Note: Always discuss your blood test results with your health care provider.

Source: Eat Right Montana