

# DIETARY FATS & HEART HEALTH



## SATURATED FAT

Saturated fats, found predominantly in animal products and certain processed foods, have been associated with an increased risk of heart disease and other cardiovascular ailments. Consuming high levels of saturated fats can elevate levels of LDL cholesterol, often referred to as "bad" cholesterol, in the bloodstream, contributing to the buildup of plaque in the arteries and raising the likelihood of heart-related complications. Recognizing the impact of saturated fats on heart health underscores the importance of adopting a balanced diet that prioritizes healthier fat sources and supports cardiovascular wellness.

## UNSATURATED FAT

Unlike saturated fats, which have been linked to increased risk of heart disease, unsaturated fats, found in foods such as avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil, offer a multitude of cardiovascular benefits. Incorporating unsaturated fats into your diet can help lower levels of LDL cholesterol, reduce inflammation, and improve overall heart function. These healthy fats are also known to increase levels of HDL cholesterol, often referred to as "good" cholesterol, which helps to clear LDL cholesterol from the bloodstream, thus further supporting heart health. Embracing a diet rich in unsaturated fats can play a pivotal role in reducing the risk of heart disease and promoting long-term cardiovascular well-being.

## TRANS FAT

Trans fats, often found in partially hydrogenated oils used in processed and fried foods, have been strongly linked to an increased risk of heart disease and other cardiovascular complications. Consumption of trans fats raises levels of LDL cholesterol while simultaneously lowering levels of HDL cholesterol, leading to the accumulation of plaque in the arteries and an elevated risk of heart attacks and strokes. Recognizing the harmful effects of trans fats underscores the importance of avoiding or minimizing their intake and opting instead for healthier fat sources to support heart health and overall well-being.

## TIPS FOR MAKING HEALTHIER DIETARY FAT CHOICES

- Consider making every other Monday a "Meatless Monday". Limiting our overall consumption of meat can help to lower our overall intake of dietary saturated fat.
- When cooking, use unsaturated plant based oils (olive oil, avocado oil, canola oil, vegetable oil...etc.) instead of bacon fat, lard, or shortening.
- Although full fat dairy is higher in saturated fat compared to reduced or skim dairy, it can still be a part of a healthy diet! When consuming full fat dairy (milk, cheese/cheese products, yogurt, ice creams/frozen desserts) choose the option with either no added sugars or the option with the least amount of added sugars. Dietary sugar in excess amounts can also affect heart health.
- Try to limit your consumption of prepackaged/processed "low-fat/reduced fat" snacks and sweets. These items will usually contain higher amounts of added sugar to make up for the loss in flavor from the reduced fat.
- Limit your consumption of trans fats. If an ingredient list contains any "hydrogenated/partially hydrogenated" oils, it contains trans fat and it is best to choose another option.
- Choose leaner animal proteins like chicken, fish, turkey, lean ground beef...etc. and trim visible fat off cuts of meat.
- Limit your consumption of fried foods and "fast foods"- these foods are usually high in saturated fats.
- Instead of frying foods, try roasting, baking, air frying, sautéing, braising, or grilling!