

## ***One More Time on Good vs. Bad Fat***

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**It seems that every time I read the paper, listen or watch the daily news I hear something about dietary fat.** And quite frankly all the fancy nomenclature is at times confusing. Terminology such as good fat, bad fat, trans fat, hydrogenated, and unhydrogenated are just some examples. The big picture is that some fats are bad for us because they can elevate our blood cholesterol and higher cholesterol levels are associated with higher cardiovascular risk. Yet, certain dietary fats are essential for maintaining a healthy nervous system. The delicate lining of our nervous tissue known as myelin for example is primarily composed of fat.

### **Types of Fat--**

Fat comes in a variety of forms—some healthy and some not so healthy. In my practice I am frequently asked about the various types of fat—specifically what types to incorporate in our diet. Fats are primarily divided into three different categories – saturated, unsaturated, and trans fat.

### **In with the Good—Unsaturated, vegetarian source**

*Unsaturated fats* are naturally in liquid form at room temperature. Examples of unsaturated fat include olive oil, canola oil, oils in nuts and seeds and the oils in fish and in avocados. Unsaturated fats generally come from vegetarian sources and tend to increase HDL levels (the **good** cholesterol) and to lower LDL levels (the **bad** cholesterol)--so you benefit in both ways. In general, doctors recommend that patients emphasize these fats in your diet.

### **Out with the Bad—Saturated and Trans Fat, animal or man-made**

*Saturated fat* is fat that is in *solid* form at room temperature. Examples of saturated fat include butter, cheese, the marbling in beef, and the fat in chicken. Saturated fat comes primarily from *animal sources* and consuming diets high in saturated fat increases LDL levels (the **bad** type of cholesterol).

*Trans fats* are fats which are normally liquid at room temperature, but have been chemically modified to be solid at room temperature through the process of hydrogenation. Trans fats are chemically altered vegetable oils used in food manufacturing to improve the shelf life as well as to enhance taste and texture and are frequently found in processed foods such as margarine and Crisco. Trans fats tend to raise LDL levels and lower HDL levels (a double whammy)--therefore its recommended consumption of trans fats be completely avoided. Avoiding trans fats can sometimes be tricky—make sure you read the labels carefully and look out for any “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated” items in the ingredient list. Even if the label says “no trans fats”, by law small amounts may still be present. A good rule of thumb is that the only way to

be sure that the product does not contain even a trace of trans fats is to NOT see “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated” in the ingredient list.

### **The Bad Actor—Trans Fat**

According to the The US Food and Drug Administration it is estimated that on average, Americans eat 4.7lb (2.14kg) of trans-fats each year. Even more alarming is that a review by the New England Journal of Medicine in 2006 concluded there was a strong connection between trans-fats consumption and coronary heart disease by boosting "bad" cholesterol levels in the body. The researchers went further to say that eliminating artificial trans-fats from the food supply could prevent between six and 19% of heart attacks and related deaths each year.

### **Cutting Out the Fat--**

Recognizing the magnitude of the problem and negative health implications of trans fat consumption, California has followed the lead of health-conscious cities such as NY City, Philadelphia and Seattle and has taken a hard line against trans fats. Recently, California became the first U.S. state to ban restaurants and food retailers from using trans-fats. In addition to this ban, California will fine restaurants who fail to abide by this law.

### **So, Here’s The Skinny on Fat—**

In summary, the most healthful fats are unsaturated. These are liquid at room temperature and come from vegetarian sources. Saturated fats come from animal sources and are solid at room temperature. Saturated fats, because they raise LDL levels should be limited. Trans fats are artificially modified fats and should be avoided altogether because they raise the bad cholesterol (LDL) and lower the good cholesterol (HDL) and have been linked with the risk of cardiovascular disease.

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