

# Healthy Eating: Fat Facts

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Our bodies need fats, as well as carbohydrates and protein, in order to function properly. Carbohydrates and proteins each have four calories per gram. Fats are calorie dense with nine calories per gram. However, not all fats are created equal. That's why choosing and using healthier fats is very important. Saturated fats and trans fats (or trans-fatty acids) are both problematic. Saturated fats can contribute to higher LDL ("bad") cholesterol and have been linked to chronic conditions such as stroke, breast cancer and coronary heart disease.

**Saturated fats** are found in animal foods like butter, as well as "tropical" oils such as coconut or palm oil, or cocoa butter. These are the fats that tend to stay solid at room temperature. And, they have been listed on food labels since 1993.

**Trans fats** are harder to identify because they are not yet required to be listed on nutrition labels.

Many health professionals believe that trans fats may raise LDL cholesterol even higher than saturated fats. Trans fats are created by adding hydrogen to vegetable oil to make it a solid fat such as shortening or stick margarine. *The term "partially hydrogenated" on an ingredient list means that the food contains trans fats.*

They are often found in processed foods and baked goods. Even healthy sounding sports or "nutrition" bars often contain trans fats. Trans fats also occur naturally in foods such as dairy products, some meats and other animal-based foods.

**Unsaturated fats** include polyunsaturated as well as monounsaturated fats and are better for your body and are often called the "good" fats. For healthy eating, we should consume mostly unsaturated fats. Polyunsaturated fats have been shown to reduce LDL cholesterol, but they may also reduce HDL ("good") cholesterol. Monounsaturated fats can reduce LDL cholesterol without affecting HDL cholesterol.

Be sure to choose oils carefully and use polyunsaturated fats such as corn, sunflower, soybean and safflower oils. Monounsaturated fats, such as those in olive, canola and peanut oils, are even healthier. Avocados, nuts, nut oils and seeds are also great sources of good fats. But, be cautious when choosing nut butters (for instance, peanut butter and other nut spreads) as these often contain additional sugars and other additives, and are mostly hydrogenated. And, as always, use any fats in moderation.

While some European countries have banned trans fats, Canada and the United States have decided to require the labeling of trans fats. Some US companies have already added trans fat to their Nutrition Facts, which will be a requirement in January 2006.

Remember, until then, you can recognize that a product contains trans fats by the term "partially hydrogenated." The knowledge we obtain from reading and comparing labels enables us to select healthier foods to keep ourselves as fit as possible. 1

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 oz. (28g/About 11 chips)	
Servings Per Container About 14	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 140	Calories from Fat 50
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 6g	9%
Saturated Fat 1g	3%
Trans Fat 0g	**
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 115mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 19g	6%
Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Sugars 2g	
Protein 2g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	Iron 2%
Vitamin E 6%	Thiamin 2%
Niacin 2%	Vitamin B <sub>6</sub> 2%
Phosphorus 6%	
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Sat Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram:	
Fat 9	Carbohydrate 4 Protein 4
** Intake of trans fat should be as low as possible.	

Polio survivor Jann Hartman has a degree in Home Economics and Nutrition, and has written and lectured on nutrition for the past 20 years. She has been living with post-polio syndrome since 1989.

She contributed a previous article, "Foods that Shut Down Stress," to the Summer 2003 issue of *Post-Polio Health*.