

Nutrition FACT CHECK

Total Fat

Saturated Fat

Trans Fat

Unsaturated Fat

Saturated Fats



What are saturated fats?

Saturated fats are usually solid at room temperature and are found in animal-based foods like beef, pork, poultry, butter, cheese, whole milk, and fatty cuts of meat, as well as tropical oils such as coconut and palm oil.¹

Overview

American dietary patterns are characterized by frequent consumption of foods rich in saturated fat, and mixed messages in the media can make it confusing to know what to eat. While saturated fat intake may not be as detrimental as previously thought, high intake is linked to an increased risk of heart disease. Understanding saturated fat sources and impact on cardiovascular disease can help individuals make choices that support long-term heart health.

Academy recommendations

1. Reduce saturated fat within a healthy diet.

- Reduce saturated fat within a healthy dietary pattern; individuals with existing cardiovascular disease may benefit from further lowering saturated fat intake as part of an individualized nutrition care plan.²
- Lower saturated fat intake is associated with decreases in total cholesterol and LDL ("bad") cholesterol and may reduce risk of heart disease and stroke.³⁻⁶

2. Replace saturated fat with unsaturated fats.

- Replace foods high in saturated fat for unsaturated fats, particularly polyunsaturated fats from plant oils like olive, canola, or soybean oil, can reduce total cholesterol and cardiovascular disease events.^{2,7,8}
- Diets rich in unsaturated fats, such as the Mediterranean diet, reduce heart disease risk and improve cholesterol levels.⁹

3. Focus on overall saturated fat reduction – not elimination of food groups.

- Overall saturated fat intake should be reduced rather than eliminating specific food groups.²
- Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt) can be included in a healthy diet.^{2,3,6,10}
- Red and processed meats are linked to higher heart disease risk; however, replacement foods matter. Choosing plant-based proteins, whole grains, and vegetables to replace/reduce red or processed meats improves heart health.^{8,11}

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Nutrition Fact Check bottom line

- Reducing saturated fat and replacing it with healthy unsaturated fats supports heart health.
- Focus on overall dietary patterns rather than elimination of food groups.
- Saturated fat can fit into a balanced diet, but moderation and thoughtful food choices matter.

For more evidence-based information on nutrition topics that are in the news, visit:
eatrightPRO.org/NutritionFactCheck

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