

# Ask Dr. Tastebud



Volume 1, issue 2

*Dr. Tastebud,*

*I have heard so many different things about fats and I am completely confused! Are there really 'good' and 'bad' fats? If so, what are they and where do I find them?*

*Food Junkie*

Dear Food Junkie,

Fats are often classified as 'good' and 'bad', although this does not explain everything. Fats are considered "bad" because they are high in calories. Most people do not realize all the good that fat does for our bodies. Fat protects our organs and actually does work to keep us warm. It provides protection and insulation for our bodies and it is essential for proper growth and development, especially in very young children.

## **The good, the bad, and the trans...**

There are two major classifications of fats based on their structure. Saturated fats are generally referred to as 'bad' because they contribute to health problems such as heart disease. Trans fats are created when hydrogen is added to a fat molecule. This process, known as hydrogenation, is a way to make liquid oils solid – which is the way margarine is made. Partially hydrogenated oils were often used in commercial baking because they do not become rancid as easily as oils, so they can sit on a grocery store shelf longer. This can also happen when a food is fried. Trans fats are also a major contributor to heart disease, so watch out for those!

## **Healthy fats...**

This does not mean that all fats are bad though! Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats have been found to be extremely beneficial to health. Found in many nuts and oils, these unsaturated fats may actually lower LDL levels of cholesterol when used in place of trans and saturated fats.

## **Making good choices...**

Just because unsaturated fats tend to be better for overall health does not mean that you should overindulge. Healthy guidelines still apply... for example, try to serve meat on no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your plate and no thicker than the palm of your hand. Trans fat should be kept as low as possible, less than 1% of your total fat intake ( or less than 2 grams in a 2,000 calorie diet). A single donut can have 4 grams of trans fat.

Be aware that food labels may round down to zero if there is a slight amount of trans fat... that can really add up, especially if you eat more than the portion described on the label! If you are going to choose a fat, try to make it an unsaturated choice.

A good frame of reference: 1 teaspoon of margarine is ~ 5 grams of fat.

## **Where are they?**

Here are some examples of fats and where they are found. Remember, aim for unsaturated fats when possible!

### Saturated:

Animal products (beef, pork, whole milk, eggs), coconut oil, palm oil.

### Trans fat:

Commercially packaged food, margarine, vegetable shortening, french fries, donuts.

### Mono-unsaturated:

Nuts, canola oil, olive oil, avocado.

### Poly-unsaturated:

Fish oil, soy, sunflower, corn, safflower oil

A good website to check out is

<http://www.myfattranslator.com/> to find out more about the amount of fat you personally need in your diet.