

## THE FACTS ABOUT

# The Fats in Your Foods

- Choosing to eat foods with healthy types of fat – and eating
- them in moderation – can go a long way toward boosting your
- health. Although some early studies seemed to link high-fat diets
- to cancer risk, with more recent studies the overall evidence suggests
- there is not a strong link.



## THE RESEARCH

The AICR/WCRF expert report and its updates have not found strong evidence that total dietary fat increases cancer risk.

However, the expert report and its updates have found that consuming processed foods with high amounts of added fats and sugars can lead to overweight and obesity, which is a cause of cancer.

The latest evidence from the Continuous Update Project, a continuation of AICR's expert report, *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective*, indicates that being overweight or obese raises your risk for developing certain cancers: colorectal, esophageal, endometrial, pancreatic, kidney, gallbladder and postmenopausal breast.

### Dietary Fats and Cancer Prevention

Our bodies need some healthy fat in our diet to absorb certain vitamins and make us feel full.

Although most plant foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans are naturally low in fat, some, such as avocados, nuts, seeds and oils are naturally high in fat. These high-fat plant foods also contain vitamins, minerals, fiber and health-protective phytochemicals, so small to moderate amounts of these foods are also part of a cancer-fighting diet.

### Strategies for a Cancer-Preventive Diet that Includes Healthful Fats

- Cover 2/3 (or more) of your plate with plant-based foods and 1/3 (or less) with lean meat, dairy and other animal protein.
- Eat whole grains and legumes (beans, peas and lentils) at most meals. Add nuts and seeds, in small amounts, to meals or snacks.
- Choose only the leanest cuts of meat and poultry. Remove the visible fat and skin.
- Opt for beans, tofu, fish or poultry more often than red meat. Red meat and processed meats are linked to colorectal cancer, so limit red meat to 18 ounces per week and avoid processed meats like ham, sausage and bacon unless it's a special occasion.
- Drink 1 percent or nonfat milk and choose low-fat cheese and yogurt.
- Fill up on veggies that have been roasted, steamed, microwaved or stir-fried in a bit of olive or canola oil while you eat less meat. Start your meal with a mixed green salad or broth-based soup. Choose soups that are vegetable and broth-based rather than cream-based. Use modest portions of dressings made with flavorful vinegars and oils. Have small plastic bags of grapes, cherries or raw veggies for healthful snacks instead of chips or a candy bar.



## Foods with Added Fats

Foods made with lots of added fats, such as chips and fried foods, are typically heavily processed so that fiber and other nutrients are removed. And eating just a small amount of these foods can provide a lot of calories without making you feel full.

## High-Fat Animal Foods

Many animal foods are naturally high in fat such as high-fat forms of red meats, processed meats (like bacon, hot dogs and sausage) and cheese. Regardless of fat content, AICR recommends limiting red meat and avoiding processed meats because they increase risk for colorectal cancer.

## THE TYPES OF FAT IN YOUR FOOD

### Saturated fat: limit these

Diets high in saturated fat are linked with risk of cardiovascular disease. These foods include:

*High-fat red meats (beef, pork, lamb); whole milk; cream; regular cheeses; butter; pastries; ice cream; lard; palm, palm kernel and coconut oils; hydrogenated oils.*

Strong scientific evidence shows that eating too much red meat (including beef, pork and lamb) and too much processed meats (like sausage, bacon, hot dogs and salami) causes colorectal cancer. Red meat, like beef, pork and lamb, can be part of a healthy, balanced diet, but AICR recommends eating no more than 18 ounces (cooked weight, which equals 24 ounces raw) a week. Reserve processed meat for special occasions.

## FISH AND OMEGA-3 FATS

There are two types of omega-3 fats, those found in cold-water fish like salmon and albacore tuna and those found in some plants, including walnuts and canola.

Evidence on whether omega-3 fatty acids play a role in reducing cancer risk is mixed, but research does suggest that these fats offer heart health benefits.

Fish can be part of a cancer-fighting diet that includes mostly plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans and limited animal protein. Aim to eat two or three servings per week of fish high in omega-3 fats, such as salmon, sardines, albacore tuna, rainbow trout, herring and bluefish. For more information and health warnings about fish for vulnerable populations, visit [www.montereybayaquarium.org](http://www.montereybayaquarium.org) and click on "Seafood Watch."

Fish oil supplements supply omega-3 fats, but they cannot provide all the nutrients found in fish. Get your doctor's approval before taking fish oil or any dietary supplement.

### Trans fat: avoid these

Although the effect of trans fats on cancer risk is not yet known, these fats do increase cardiovascular disease risk. Trans fats are formed by partial hydrogenation and found in:

*Stick margarine and shortening*

Some foods that may be made with partially hydrogenated oils and contain trans fat include: *French fries and other deep-fried foods; doughnuts; packaged cookies; crackers; chips; pie crust; muffins.*

Try to keep your trans fat intake as close to zero as possible. Even when the Nutrition Facts label says "0 grams of trans fat," a trace amount may still exist in one serving. Check the ingredients list and avoid products that contain partially hydrogenated oils.

### Unsaturated fat: choose these

Substituting these fats for saturated and trans fats may help lower your LDL ("bad") cholesterol. There are different types of unsaturated fats:

Monounsaturated: *olive, canola and peanut oils; avocados; almonds, peanuts and most other nuts and seeds (except walnuts).*

Polyunsaturated: *safflower, sunflower, corn and soybean oils and seeds; omega-3 fatty acids (see box): salmon, canned albacore (white) tuna, sardines, mackerel, rainbow trout, herring and bluefish; flaxseed, canola, walnut and soybean oils; walnuts and ground flaxseed.*

