

Learning About Fats

KIDS HEALTH®

Fat is a part of food. Some foods, including most fruits and vegetables, have almost no fat. Other foods have a lot of fat like nuts, oils, butter and meats like beef.

The name - fat - may make it sound like something you shouldn't eat. But fat is an important part of a healthy diet. And little kids, especially, need a certain amount of fat in their diets so the brain and nervous system develops correctly. That's why toddlers need to drink whole milk, which has more fat. Older kids can drink low-fat or skim milk.

How much fat should you eat? Experts suggest kids who are 6 to 8 eat 48 to 60 grams per day. Older kids, between 9 and 12, should eat about 60 to 75 grams. That's about 27% of a kid's daily calories. Babies need more, but kids older than 2 and adults should get less than 30% of their daily calories from fat, nutrition experts say. You can figure out how many grams of fat are in a food by looking at the food label. Peanut butter, for instance, contains 16 grams of fat in 2 tablespoons.

Types of Fat

You might see ads for foods that say they're "low-fat" or "fat-free." Lower-fat diets have been recommended for health and to help people lose weight. But nutrition experts are finding that fats are more complicated. Some kinds of fat are actually good for your health. As a bonus, fat in food helps people feel full, so they don't eat as much.

But that doesn't mean a high-fat diet is good for you. And some fats are better than others. Here are the three major types:

Unsaturated fats: These are found in plant foods and fish. These may be good for your heart. The best of the unsaturated fats are found in olive oil, peanut oil, canola oil, albacore tuna and salmon.

Saturated fats: These fats are found in meat and other animal products, such as butter, cheese, and all milk except fat-free milk. Saturated fats are also in palm and coconut oils, which are often used in baked goods (the kind you buy at the store). Eating too much saturated fat can be unhealthy and bad for your heart.

Trans fats: These fats are found in margarine, especially the sticks. Trans fats are also found in certain foods that you buy at the store or in a restaurant, such as snack foods, baked goods and fried foods. When you see "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated" oils on an ingredient list, the food contains trans fats. Like saturated fats, eating too much can be unhealthy and bad for your heart.

Why Do We Need Fat?

Dietary fat helps kids' bodies grow and develop like it should. Fats fuel the body and help absorb some vitamins. They also are the building blocks of hormones and they insulate nervous system tissue in the body.

So fat is not the enemy, but you'll want to choose the right amount - and the right kind - of fat. If you're getting most of your fat from protein-rich meats, nuts, and heart-healthy oils, you've already made fat your friend!

Name: _____

Finding Fat Facts

Using the "Learning about Fats" article, answer the following questions with complete sentences.

1. What is fat?
2. What are the three major types of fat and where do they come from?
3. Name 3 things that fat does to help our bodies work properly.
4. Name 4 foods that have lots of fat in them.
5. According to MyPyramid for Kids, how often should we eat foods like these?