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## Low-fat Diet Sheet

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A diet that is generally low in fat can help you to lose weight, or to maintain a healthy weight. Maintaining a healthy weight will reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke, diabetes and certain types of cancer. There are other conditions in which a low-fat diet is of use, such as gallstones.

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## Fat content of various foods

Food type	Low-fat foods	Medium-fat foods	Higher-fat foods
Cereal foods	Bread and flour, oats, breakfast cereals, rice and pasta are all low in fat, but the higher-fibre varieties have other benefits too.	Plain biscuits. Plain or fruit scones.	Croissants. Fried bread. Most cakes and biscuits. Pastries. Suet pudding.
Fruit, vegetables and nuts	All fresh, frozen or tinned vegetables and fruit. Dried beans and lentils. Baked or boiled potatoes. Dried fruit.	Oven chips are lower in fat than fried chips. The following contain fat, but it is the unsaturated sort:  Avocados Olives Almonds Pecans Hazelnuts Walnuts	Chips. Fried or roast potatoes. Fried, creamed, buttered or cheesy vegetables. Crisps and potato snacks. Coconut. Brazils. Roasted peanuts.
Fish	All white fish. Shellfish.	Oily fish such as tuna (fresh, not tinned), herring, mackerel, sardines, kippers, pilchards, or salmon. These contain healthy omega-3 fats.	Fish roe. Caviar.
Meat	Lean white meat such as chicken and turkey breast (without skin).	Lean ham, beef, pork, and lamb. Lean mince. Liver and kidney.	Visible fat on meat. Crackling. Sausages. Pâtés. Duck, goose. Meat pies and pasties.
Eggs, dairy foods	Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk. Cottage or curd cheese. Low-fat yoghurt. Egg whites.	Edam. Camembert. Eggs.	Whole milk. Cream. Ice cream. Most hard cheeses. Chocolate. Cream cheese.
Fats and spreads	None.	Low-fat spreads. Margarine high in polyunsaturates. Corn oil, sunflower oil and olive oil.	Butter. Dripping and lard. Margarine not high in polyunsaturates.
Drinks and soups	Tea and coffee. Mineral water. Fruit juices.	Packet soups.	Cream soups. Milky drinks.

## Low-fat diets and weight loss or weight maintenance

If you want to lose weight, you need to eat fewer calories per day than you burn off in exercise. Foods which are high in fat contain a lot of calories, so cutting down on fatty foods is one way of losing weight. Very sugary foods also contain quite a lot of calories, but fat contains about twice as many calories as sugar per 100 g.

See separate leaflets called [Healthy Eating](#) for a more general overview of food and health, and [Weight Reduction - How to Lose Weight](#) which gives advice if you are planning to lose weight.

## More about fats

Not all fat is bad. Although all fats are high in calories, we need some fat in our diet, and some types of fat are actually good for our health. The different types of fat include the following:

### Saturated fats

These are mainly found in animal products such as the fat on meat, in lard, and the fat in dairy products such as butter, full-cream milk, etc. Meat and dairy products have a useful role in a healthy diet, but try to avoid the fattier cuts of meat and use semi-skimmed or skimmed milk if you are trying to cut down on fat. Eating less saturated fat may reduce your risk of having a heart attack.

### Trans fats

These are oils which have come from vegetables but have been processed to make them hard, so that they are easier to use in food. They are often used in processed foods, and in commercially made cakes, biscuits and pastries. Trans fats are generally bad for you and there is no place for them in a healthy diet.

### Unsaturated fats

These mainly come from vegetables, nuts and fruits. They are divided into:

- Polyunsaturated fats such as sunflower oil, and corn oil.
- Mono-unsaturated fats such as olive oil and rapeseed oil.
- Omega-3 fatty acids. These come mainly from oily fish such as pilchards, sardines, salmon, mackerel and fresh (not tinned) tuna. Omega 3 fatty acids are also present in some nuts and seeds, especially linseeds.

Omega-3 fatty acids may help prevent heart disease and improve our health in other ways. See separate leaflet called **Cholesterol** which gives more details about reducing your cholesterol level.

Unsaturated fats contain as many calories as saturated fats, but can form part of a healthy diet. If you are trying to lose weight, make sure that you are not eating too much unsaturated fat.

## Food labels

Foods that contain fat often contain a mixture of saturated and unsaturated fats. Food labels often list the amounts of each type of fat in the food (or at least how much of the fat in the food is saturated). As a rule, we should aim to limit our intake of saturated fats, and when we use fats and oils, mainly to choose those high in unsaturates. Food labels also show how many calories are in the food. So, it may be a good idea to get into the habit of reading food labels when you shop.

## Further help & information

### British Nutrition Foundation

Imperial House 6th Floor, 15-19 Kingsway , London, WC2B 6UN

Tel: 020 7557 7930

Web: [www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)

### British Dietetic Association

Web: [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)

### Change4Life

Tel: 0300 123 4567

Web: [www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/change-for-life.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/change-for-life.aspx)

## Live Well - NHS Choices

Web: [www.nhs.uk/livewell/Pages/Livewellhub.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/Pages/Livewellhub.aspx)

## Further reading & references

- [Obesity](#), NICE Clinical Guideline (December 2006)

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