

Alberta Healthy Living Program (Diversity, Mandarin, and Cantonese)

Fat

Introduction:

Fat is important for our overall health. Fats tend to get a bad reputation, but not all fats are created equal. Some fats are important to keep our heart healthy while others should be limited. At today's show, we shall learn about the different types of fat and how they affect our heart health, what foods contain them and how to make healthy choices!

What are the different types of fat?

There are 4 different types of fat that can be found in our food.

- (1) Monounsaturated fat: is a heart healthy fat naturally found in olive and canola oil, non-hydrogenated margarines, avocados and nuts like almonds, pistachios, pecans and cashews.
- (2) Polyunsaturated fat: is also a type of healthy fats that include omega-3 and omega-6 fats. However, it is important to include more Omega-3 than Omega-6 fats in our food because our bodies cannot make them.

For example, Omega-3 fats are found in fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, trout, herring and sardines. They are also found in oils and some soft margarines. Omega-3 fats are also added to eggs and some milk products.

Omega-6 fats are found in safflower, sunflower and corn oils. They are also found in nuts and seed such as almonds, pecans, Brazil nuts, sunflower seeds and sesame seeds.

- (3) Saturated fat: is an unhealthy fat that is naturally found in foods from animals such as fatty cuts of meat, poultry with the skin on and higher fat milk, cheese, and yogurt. Saturated fat is also found in tropical oils, including coconut and palm kernel oils which we often find them in highly processed packaged food.
- (4) Trans fat: is also an unhealthy fat and it is the least desirable fat in our diet. It is made from liquid oil that is then changed into a solid fat. Trans fat adds texture and flavour to food. It is most often found in commercially baked goods, fried foods, and processed foods like packaged salty snacks and convenience foods including frozen foods.

It is important to note that trans-fat can also be found naturally in some foods. Meat, milk, and butter naturally contain small amounts of trans fat. The trans-fat found naturally in foods is different than manufactured trans-fat and does not increase your risk of heart disease.

Which fats should I choose and how much?

Unsaturated fats such as COPS (Canola, Olive, Peanut, Sesame) can help to lower bad cholesterol.

To keep your heart healthy, have a small amount (not more than 2 to 3 Tbsp) of unsaturated fat each day. This suggested amount (2 to 3 tablespoons of oil each day) is the total quantity of oil used for cooking, salad dressings, margarine, and mayonnaise for the whole day.

Which fats should I limit?

To lower your risk of heart disease, it is best to limit saturated fats in our diet. Limit foods such as processed deli, bacon, Chinese sausage, hot dogs; Fatty cuts of meat and chicken with the skin on, higher fat dairy products such as homogenized milk, lard, shortening, hard margarine and butter.

As much as possible, aim to have zero trans fats in your diet. Canada no longer allows trans-fat to be added to food. However, in some foods, trans fat may be replaced with saturated fat such as palm oil.

How can saturated fat affect my health? Are all saturated fats the same?

Too much saturated fat may increase your risk for heart disease and stroke.

No. There are different kinds of saturated fats. Some saturated fats impact our bodies more negatively than others. Because foods naturally contain a mixture of different saturated fats, it is hard to choose foods based on one particular type of saturated fat. Therefore, it is best to limit all saturated fat.

For a while, we have heard a lot about using coconut oil in our food preparation. What is coconut oil? Should I use coconut oil?

Coconut oil is made from pressed coconut and is mostly made up of saturated fat. There are two kinds of coconut oil – unrefined and refined. Unrefined coconut oil is sometimes called virgin coconut oil and has a stronger taste and richer flavour. Refined coconut oil is more processed and is better for cooking at high temperatures.

Coconut oil has a high smoking point which works well when frying foods. It is also used in baking because it has a “nutty” flavour.

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If you enjoy the taste of coconut oil, you can enjoy it in small amounts occasionally as part of a healthy eating pattern. There is not enough evidence to show that it has health benefits. In fact, choose mostly heart healthy oils like canola, olive, peanut, and sesame oils. Remember to use oil in moderation because they are high in calories.

Where does cholesterol come from?

- (1) Our bodies naturally produce cholesterol in our liver and circulate in our blood. This blood cholesterol has important function, it helps us to make hormones and digestive fluids.
- (2) Cholesterol can come from the foods we eat and this is called “dietary cholesterol”.

Dietary cholesterol is only found in animal foods like meat, poultry, milk products, eggs, fish and seafood. Vegetables and plant-based foods do not have cholesterol.

What are the two types of cholesterol?

- (1) LDL cholesterol is known as “bad cholesterol”. Too much “bad cholesterol” can lead to plaque buildup in our arteries, and this can lead to an increased risk of heart disease.
- (2) HDL cholesterol is known as “good cholesterol”. It works the opposite of “bad cholesterol” because it helps lower our risk of heart disease.

Do you get high cholesterol from eating too much cholesterol in food?

The short answer is no. Most people do not need to count how much cholesterol they get from the food they eat each day.

The amount of cholesterol you get from food usually has little impact on your blood cholesterol. It is the quality and quantity of fat we consume matters most on our blood cholesterol.

High blood cholesterol levels (“bad cholesterol”) are a risk factor for heart disease. At one time, it was understood that dietary cholesterol was the main reason for high blood cholesterol levels in our bodies. However, with the more recent research, it has shown that this is not the case.

Although some foods contain high amounts of cholesterol, saturated fat and trans-fat have a higher negative impact on blood cholesterol levels than cholesterol we eat from our diet.

There are many reasons why we may have high blood cholesterol levels. In short, genetics, and diet (what we eat and how much we eat) are two factors that impact our blood cholesterol levels.

Do I need to avoid eggs in my diet?

Eggs are an excellent source of protein, and they contain many vitamins and minerals.

Like with most foods we eat, eggs should be eaten in moderation. If you are in good health and do not have a history of heart disease, you can include eggs as part of a nutritious, balanced diet.

Recent studies have not shown a link between eating eggs causing higher cholesterol. However, you may want to consider how you prepare the eggs for example, poaching vs deep-fried.

If you have diabetes, or heart disease, it is recommended that you eat lesser dietary cholesterol. Speak to a dietitian or your healthcare provider about how much dietary cholesterol is right for you.

What can I do to prevent or lower high cholesterol levels?

- (1) Choose more plant-based protein foods such as beans, lentils, tofu, nuts, seeds, and protein foods that are lower in saturated fat such as lean cuts of meat, skinless poultry and lower fat dairy products (i.e. 1% milk).
- (2) Compare nutrition labels to find out which products are lower in saturated and total fats. Look at the % Daily Value for saturated fat and choose the foods with the lower numbers. Look for products with no trans-fat and that indicate 'low fat' on the package as a general guide.
- (3) Choose foods that contain unsaturated fat, like canola or olive oil, avocado, salmon and trout, and unsalted nuts and seeds.
- (4) Choose healthier food preparation method such as are grilled, roasted and poached instead of deep fried or breaded (foods prepared with breadcrumbs).
- (5) Eat foods higher in fibre such as choose more whole grains (oatmeal, barley, whole grain bread), beans, peas, lentils, variety of vegetables and fruits (oranges, apples, pears).

How can Alberta Healthy Living Program help support the Chinese in the community?

- We have one Registered Dietitian speaking both Mandarin and Cantonese who can offer one-on-one advice via phone, Zoom or in person meeting.
- These services have no charge and are covered by Alberta Health. You do not need a referral from a health care provider - you can just call to book appointment.
- All our programs and services can be accessed through one toll-free number: 1-844-527-1160. Please write this number down. An English recording will run and ask them to wait until a person answer to state Mandarin for the clerks to quickly access an interpreter.

- Better choices, better health (BCBH) for chronic disease management and BCBH-chronic pain that are offered in Cantonese, and they can register for this 6-week program (one 2.5-hour session per week) by also phoning toll-free: 1-844-527-1160.