



Dietary Recommendations

What are Trans-fats? I was told to avoid Trans-fat.

Trans-fats are partially hydrogenated oils; they are a new term to the consumer marketplace. Trans-fats are found in many food products. Trans-fats can increase the shelf life of many products by chemically changing polyunsaturated fatty acids which tend to oxidize and make fat become rancid over time. Margarine, french fries from fast food restaurants and commercial baked goods frequently contain trans-fats. Trans-fats may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease by increasing LDL (bad) cholesterol and decreasing HDL (good) cholesterol. It may also trigger obesity, insulin resistance and type II diabetes. The FDA now requires labeling of trans-fats on packed foods. Even small amounts of trans-fats should be avoided. However, just because a label might read “trans-fat free” does not mean the product is good for you. A product can still be 100% fat-free and loaded with calories.

What are Omega-3 Fatty Acids?

Omega-3 Fatty Acids are an important group of essential fatty acids (EFAs) which means they are essential to human health but cannot be made by the human body. Omega 3 fatty acids are either plant based (alpha-linoleic acid) or fish based (EPA & DHA). Omega-6 fatty acids are also considered essential fatty acids (EFAs). Together these fats play a critical role in human brain development, bone health, reproduction, and metabolism. Historically, food supplied our diets with roughly a 1:4 ratio of Omega-3 fatty acid to Omega-6 fatty acids. Our highly processed (modern) diet in the U.S. now supplies a diet of 11 to 30 times more Omega-6 fatty acid to Omega-3. Excess amounts of Omega-6 fatty acids promote inflammation, which can lead to several diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and arthritis. The Mediterranean diet provides an example of a healthier balance between the Omega fatty acids as it supplies a generous amount of whole grains, fresh vegetables, whole fruits, small amounts of olive oil and garlic, with limited amounts of meat.

What can I do to increase Omega-3 in my diet?

The best way is to increase the intake of Omega-3 fatty acids (and decrease your intake of Omega-6) is to create a plant-based food plan, consisting of whole grains, fresh vegetables, whole fruits, and small amounts of lean proteins. Many dietitians recommend 2 meals a week of oil rich fish such as salmon, herring, mackerel and sardines. However, many farmed fish have increased levels of mercury so fish oil supplements or cod liver oil are also an option. An additional way to decrease your Omega-6 intake is to cut down on processed foods such as crackers, chips, cookies, fried foods, and many oils such as sunflower oil, safflower oil, corn oil and soybean oil. Use small amounts of nuts (i.e. 1 Tablespoon), and small amounts of oils (i.e. 1 Teaspoon portion) such as olive oil, canola oil or flax seed oil). Using a spray oil is a great way to limit your fat calories and fat portion instead of simply pouring oil from a bottle.

I was told to increase soluble fiber in my diet. What is soluble fiber?

There are 2 main types of fiber, both soluble and insoluble fiber. Both are essential to health. Together they prevent heart disease, certain types of cancer, and diabetes. Plants are the only source of fiber; meat and dairy products are void of any fiber. Soluble fiber (such as the pectin in apples) forms a gel when mixed with liquid. Soluble fiber has been shown to lower both total and LDL cholesterol (bad cholesterol), thereby reducing the risks of heart disease. Soluble fiber also helps to regulate blood sugar in people with diabetes. Since dietary fiber contains no calories, it helps with weight management and provides bulk to a meal that leads to satiety and a sense of fullness. Insoluble fiber, such as the bran found in cereals and whole wheat bread, passes through the intestines largely intact. Insoluble fiber is essential in that it provides bulk to bowel movements and more rapid movement through the intestinal tract. Regular bowel movements help to prevent constipation, colon cancer, hemorrhoids and diverticulitis. The recommended intake of dietary fiber is between 25-35 grams per day (based on the recommended calorie intake for your age and gender). The typical American only consumes 1/3 to 1/2 of the recommended amount of fiber. Our over-consumption of processed food, refined grains, and concentrated sugars and fats result in the typical low-fiber American diet.

What foods have insoluble and soluble fiber?

Many grains such as oat, oat bran, barley and flax seed have both types of fiber. Soluble fiber includes: oatmeal, nuts, peas, beans, lentils, apples, pears, strawberries and blueberries. Insoluble fiber includes: green leafy vegetables, fruit skins, whole grain bread, whole grain breakfast cereals, seeds, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, zucchini and celery. A food plan that emphasizes plants (whole grains and cereals, fresh vegetables, and whole fruits) will have a healthy mix of fiber. A typical ½ cup serving of each has about 2-3 grams of fiber. One easy way to increase dietary fiber is to make sure all meals and snacks contain some form of plant-based whole, unrefined food. It is important to read labels. When purchasing cereals and crackers, always refer to the Nutrition Facts panel, and look for “fiber.” Remember to strive for 25-35 grams per day. Most fiber supplements are insoluble fiber.

I am on a weight loss diet. Do polyunsaturated fats or monounsaturated fats like olive oil have fewer calories?

From a calorie standpoint, all oils are equally fattening. They contain 120 calories per tablespoon (the equivalent of a 1.2 mile walk). For optimum weight loss, build your food plan on whole grains, fresh vegetables, whole fruit, limited amounts of low-fat dairy products and lean meats, and restrict fat and oil consumption. Oil sprays provide a great way to deliver the flavor of fat without the high calorie load (most have only 1 calorie per spray).

What is better: Butter or Margarine?

Neither. Both have good and bad points. Use them sparingly. Choose your favorite fat occasionally and make those calories count.

How do I read a food label?

The first information to look for on a Nutrition Facts label is the calorie content and the serving size. The label may say “150 calories” on a cookie but since the serving number is “4”, one must multiply the calories by the serving number to know the true calorie cost of the product. It is very easy to be fooled. Ask yourself if you can be satisfied with one serving. If you must consume the entire box to feel full, you may want to put the box back on the shelf. Additional helpful information is supplied for the amount of fat, protein, fiber, sugar, and sodium in a product. Try to choose products that supply some healthy amount of fiber (3 or more grams per serving), and lower amounts of fat (less than 30% of the total calories). The Nutrition Facts label gives recommendations based on a 2000-calorie diet for most nutrients. If a product contains 100% of the sodium recommended for the day, think twice before buying it. Avoiding high amounts of products with added sugar, fat, and sodium is highly beneficial to overall health and the prevention of chronic disease.