

# fitness

mind, body & spirit



Instant shine  
for summer-  
stressed hair p. 52


## EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT



How much do you need? What's the best way to burn it off?  
Your most pressing questions answered.



Whether it's in your food or on your body, fat can be your friend. It helps fuel your long workouts, makes your meals taste better and may even help you live longer. But even in this carb-phobic world, fat is still nutrient non grata. In fact, according to a recent food-industry marketing report, almost half of Americans hold the amount of fat in their food as their number one diet concern.

So what exactly is fat? Why is it so darn scary? And what's the difference between good and bad fats anyway? Experts answer these burning questions and more. 

By Julie Upton, R.D. • Photographs by Svend Lindbaek

**According to research, a body fat percentage greater than 32 in young women (35 in women over age 40) can lead to health problems.**

## \*GOOD FATS, BAD FATS—WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?

When experts talk about "good" and "bad" fats, they're really talking about the effect that certain fats have on the body. Saturated and trans fats both clog arteries, which can lead to hypertension, stroke or heart disease. Since saturated fats are found in many healthful foods like seafood and eggs, most experts advise limiting, not eliminating, your intake. However, **almost every major health organization recommends avoiding trans fats entirely.** Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, on the other hand, are actually beneficial. Consuming most of your fat from these sources may help reduce your disease risk.

## THE FACTS ON FAT

The good fats	Where they're found	How much to get
<b>MONOUNSATURATED FATS</b>	Olive, canola, peanut oils; nuts and avocados.	10 to 15 percent of calories
<b>POLYUNSATURATED FATS</b>	Corn, safflower, sesame, soy and sunflower oils (and in margarines, salad dressings and mayonnaise made with these oils), nuts and seeds	About 5 to 10 percent of calories. Strive for an equal balance of omega-3s and omega-6s in your diet.
<b>Omega-3 fats</b>	Cold-water fish like herring, mackerel, salmon, sardines and tuna; flaxseed, canola oil and walnuts	
The bad fats	Where they're found	How much to get
<b>SATURATED FATS</b>	Meats, dairy foods, eggs, coconut, palm and palm-kernel oils, processed foods such as cookies, crackers, chips and other baked goods	No more than 10 percent of calories
<b>TRANS FATS</b>	Stick margarines, shortening, packaged baked goods, candy, snack foods, french fries and other fried foods. A very small amount also occurs naturally in meat, poultry and dairy	None or as little as possible

## How can I tell if I'm too fat?

The best way is to check your waistline. "Anything more than 33 inches is a warning sign that you're carrying around too much visceral fat," says Steven Heymsfield, M.D., director of the Obesity Research Center at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital in New York City. Abdominal visceral fat could be called the silent killer, because studies show that the more you have, the greater your risk of heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. "Unfortunately, you can't see or pinch it, because it lies deep in your body," explains Kerry Stewart, an associate professor of medicine and director of clinical exercise physiology at Johns Hopkins University.

## WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO BURN IT OFF? EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE.

"It's the 'spot reducer' of visceral fat," says Stewart, whose research found that a six-month combination aerobic and strength-training program can burn off as much as 20 percent of visceral fat stores. Consuming reduced-fat dairy foods may also help, according to a growing body of evidence.

## HOW MUCH FAT DO I NEED?

Your weight (in pounds)	Ideal total fat intake *	monounsaturated fat *	polyunsaturated fat *	saturated fat *
110	39-68	20-29	10-20	Fewer than 20
120	43-75	21-32	11-21	Fewer than 21
130	46-81	23-35	12-23	Fewer than 23
140	50-87	25-37	12-25	Fewer than 25
150	53-93	27-40	13-27	Fewer than 27
160	57-100	28-43	14-28	Fewer than 28

Assumes moderate activity two or three times per week.

## Do I really need fat?

**Yes!** You can't live without it. "Dietary fats are used to produce hormones and neurotransmitters that affect everything from hunger to sex drive," says Martha Belury, Ph.D., R.D., a professor of nutrition at Ohio State University.

Body fat provides insulation for your body when it's cold out, acts as a cushion to protect your organs and is a concentrated source of energy when your carbohydrate stores run out (say, while you're running a long-distance race). It's also what makes you uniquely feminine, and we're not just talking J. Lo curves. "The fat on your body is essential for manufacturing certain sex hormones, which is why women with extremely low body fat frequently miss periods or have trouble conceiving," explains Belury.

**Still not convinced? Here's what else fat do:**

- Help guard against osteoporosis by assisting in the absorption of vitamin D, which your body needs to utilize calcium.
- Maintain your eye health by increasing vitamin A absorption.
- Slow the aging process. Some fats (such as those from avocados and nuts and seeds and their oils) supply vitamin E, an important antioxidant.
- Boost absorption of vitamin K, which helps blood to clot. Without vitamin K, a minor scrape could be life-threatening.
- Act as a carrier for hundreds of cancer-fighting carotenoids that help prevent heart disease and certain cancers and protect skin and eyes from the sun's rays.
- Support optimal brain function.
- Maintain a healthy immune system.
- Ensure strong nails, shiny hair and clear skin.

## Doesn't fat cause disease?

Dietary fat poses a problem only if you eat too much of it. "High-fat diets are implicated in several chronic illnesses, some of which are the top killers of American women," says Belury. "They contribute to heart disease, some cancers and even diabetes." If more than 45 percent of your calories come from fat, then you're getting less protein and carbohydrate than you need. **The National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine recommends consuming 20 to 35 percent of your total calories as fat to meet nutrient needs and prevent disease.** That translates to 40 to 70 grams of fat for a woman eating about 1,800 calories daily. For your personal fat-gram budget, see "How Much Fat Do I Need?" opposite.

## Why is it so difficult to get rid of?

Your body is extremely efficient at storing fat. "If you consume an excess of 100 fat calories a day, 98 percent of them will be stored as body fat," explains James O. Hill, Ph.D., director of the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. "But only around 75 percent of excess carbohydrate and 65 percent of excess protein calories get put away, because the chemical process of converting these calories into body fat is more complicated." The magic word in all this is **excess**. In other words, if you're planning on over-indulging, it's better to do it on fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein—instead of fat.

**20%** The minimum amount of dietary fat recommended by the Institute of Medicine

## Will eating fat make me fat?

It sure will, but only if you eat more calories than you burn off through exercise. Having said that, a high-fat diet makes it a lot easier to consume excess calories, because a gram of pure fat contains more than double the calories of a gram of protein or carbohydrate.

## ARE WOMEN MORE PRONE TO PACKING ON FAT?

**UNFORTUNATELY, YES.** "Women have a genetic predisposition to carry more fat to ensure the health of a fetus," says Belury. "It's a holdover from prehistoric times, when famine could threaten the survival of the species. Our genes simply haven't caught up to our modern-day lifestyle." Estrogen, progesterone and other hormones all promote fat storage, which is why women gain the most weight during puberty and pregnancy. The hips and thighs—the area immediately surrounding the reproductive system—are the main storage depots. (During menopause, fat doesn't accumulate as rapidly and the distribution pattern changes to be more like a man's. The abdomen, not the hips and thighs, becomes female trouble spot number one.)

## WHERE ARE THE TRANS FATS?

You won't see trans fats listed on packages until 2006, when the FDA's labeling requirement takes effect. Until then, here's how to avoid these deadly fats:

• Total the grams from monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and saturated fat as listed on the food label. If the number is lower than the total fat grams listed, the remainder is most likely trans fat. (Be aware that some labels won't disclose grams of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, because including them is voluntary.)

• Check ingredients labels for hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils; both are the main dietary sources of trans fats. These oils are lurking in some seemingly healthy places—Wheaties cereal, microwave popcorn and reduced-fat salad dressings, to name just a few—so be vigilant. One place you won't find them: Foods that carry the USDA Certified Organic seal. Organic-food guidelines don't allow for the process of hydrogenation.