Dietary Fats: The good, the bad, and the ugly

Did you know that the types of fats you eat are more important to your health than the total amount of fat in your diet? Eating foods rich in plant and fish oils, and low in fats from animal sources (saturate fat) and trans fat, reduces the risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes, both of which can begin developing during childhood. Making simple changes in your food habits can make a big difference for health.

UNSATURATED FATS — “The Good” ➔
What: Oils found in plant and fish foods
Where: Vegetable oils (olive, canola, etc.), fish, nuts, seeds, peanut and other nut butters.

EAT MORE of these
Eat LOW or NON fat dairy, lean meats

SATURATED FATS — “The Bad” ➔
What: Fats found mostly in animal foods
Where: Whole milk, cheese, butter, ice cream, red meat, sour cream, lard, coconut and palm oils.

AVOID these

TRANS FATS — “The Ugly” ➔
What: Vegetable oils that are chemically changed to increase the shelf life of processed foods.
Where: Fast foods, snacks (cookies, crackers, etc.), baked goods, and stick margarines.

Tips for making changes at home

- Select dairy products made with 1% or non-fat milk, instead of whole or 2% milk.
- Substitute fish, chicken, legumes, nuts and seeds for red meat at meal times.
- Limit fast food meals to 1-2/week.
- Cook with liquid oils and tub margarine, instead of butter, stick margarine or lard.
- Read food labels to select foods with NO trans fat.* Avoid foods with “partially hydrogenated vegetable oil” or “shortening” in the ingredients list.

*By 2006, food labels must declare grams of trans fat.

For more information:
- Check out www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/fats.html

Provided by the Prevention Research Center at Harvard School of Public Health
© 2005, President and Fellows of Harvard College
www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc