

# Australian Oilseed Federation

## Nutrition Fact Sheets



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### Types of Fat

Not only should you worry about the *amount* of fat you consume, but the *type* of fat can make a big difference to your health outlook. When it comes to things like blood cholesterol levels or diabetes, not all fats are 'bad'. Saturated and trans fats are the culprits but mono- and polyunsaturated fats are beneficial. Remember that all fats, regardless of type, supply the same amount of fat and kilojoules.

Foods carry a mixture of saturated, monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and trans fats (technically fatty acids). No fat is completely saturated or completely polyunsaturated. The predominant fat gives the food its classification. For example, canola oil is classed as monounsaturated, yet contains 63 per cent monounsaturated fats plus 30 per cent polyunsaturated and 7 per cent saturated.

**Saturated fats** tend to be solid and are found mainly in animal foods such as butter, cream, fat on meat, cheese, milk fat, lard and dripping. Two vegetable oils, however, are saturated and are used in the food industry. Palm oil (50 per cent saturated) is derived from a tropical palm and is widely used for deep-frying in fast food outlets and to make snack foods, pastries and biscuits. It is commonplace because it is cheap, readily available and has good keeping qualities. Coconut oil (90 per cent saturated) is a fat with unique characteristics needed to make certain types of biscuits, pies, confectionery and fillings for chocolates. Both are often listed as *vegetable oils* on food packs, so there is no way of knowing they are present. Saturated fats tend to raise both the total and harmful LDL-cholesterol, which increases your risk of heart problems. We need to eat less of this type of fats.

**Monounsaturated fats** predominate in olives, olive oil, canola oil, monounsaturated sunflower oil, peanuts, peanut oil, avocados and most nuts. All vegetable oils contain some monounsaturates, as do lean meats, chicken, eggs and fish. Monounsaturates reduce levels of the harmful LDL-cholesterol in the blood, although not as effectively as the polyunsaturates. But, they tend to be more stable and less likely to oxidise, so draw less on antioxidants.

**Polyunsaturated fats** are generally liquid oils at room temperature. They are found in all fats and exist as two distinct types:

- **Omega-3 fats** such as alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) and its derivatives eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), can reduce the tendency for the blood to clot and so lessen its 'stickiness'. EPA and DHA are primarily found in the fats of fish, particularly deep-sea oily fish such as herring, salmon, tuna, mackerel and sardines. ALA is found in plant foods such as linseed, canola, soybeans, walnuts and dark green leafy vegetables.
- **Omega-6 fats** like linoleic acid are the main polyunsaturated fatty acids of common vegetable oils (sunflower, safflower, maize, cottonseed and grapeseed), some nuts and polyunsaturated margarines. Polyunsaturated fats are good at reducing total cholesterol, which has made them an important factor in diets for the heart.

**Trans fats** (trans fatty acids or TFA) are polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fatty acids that can raise LDL-cholesterol, and they raise it to the same degree as do saturated fats. Although chemically they are unsaturated, trans fats have a different configuration of atoms and so behave biologically as if they were saturated.

Humans have been consuming trans fatty acids for centuries, as they occur in butter, milk, beef and lamb. They are also formed during the manufacture of commercial margarine, when liquid vegetable oils are hydrogenated (hardened) to turn them into a solid spread. These 'industrial trans fats' turn up in bought biscuits, cakes, snack foods and fried foods which use commercial hydrogenated fats.

In Australia and New Zealand, the intake of trans fats is lower than in the USA or the UK. Most margarines used in the home are now free of trans fats.

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## How your fat should be divided

Saturated+ trans	less than 8-10 per cent of kilojoules
Poly	10 per cent of kilojoules
Mono	10 per cent of kilojoules

## Make the fat switch

Replace your saturated fat with the healthier unsaturated types. Here's how:

- cook with oils instead of butter or lard
  - add nuts or seeds to stir fries and salads
  - spread avocado or margarine on sandwiches instead of cheese
  - try mayonnaise made with sunflower or canola oil
  - pop corn with canola oil and skip the butter
  - snack on nuts instead of potato crisps and corn chips
  - dip your bread in olive oil instead of using butter
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