What Are The Different Types Of Dietary Fats?

This educational sheet was created to outline the different types of fat in the human diet and to guide the public about which types to choose or avoid for heart health.

DIETARY FATS TO LIMIT

Saturated fat, hydrogenated fat, and *trans* fat may raise your total cholesterol and LDL-cholesterol levels, therefore it is recommended that they are reduced in the diet:

Saturated Fat:

- Saturated fats are a main dietary factor in raising LDL-cholesterol ("bad" cholesterol).
- Saturated fats can be detected by reading the food label. They are also usually solid at room temperature (for example butter, the fat you see in bacon, bologna)
- They are called "Saturated" because they have all the hydrogen atoms that the carbon atoms can hold—i.e. they are "full."
- The main dietary sources of saturated fat are found made from animals and animal products such as whole milk, cheese, meat and butter.
- Fewer than 10% of your daily calories should be from saturated fat (fewer than 7% if your LDL-cholesterol is high, or if you have diabetes or coronary heart disease).

Hydrogenated Fat:

- Hydrogenated fats are created during food processing when fats may undergo a chemical process called "hydrogenation."
    - Hydrogenation can be thought of as a chemical process that creates more saturated fats from unsaturated fats by adding hydrogen.
- Hydrogenated fats can be identified in foods under the list of ingredients as "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated" vegetable oils.
- Hydrogenated fats may raise LDL-cholesterol.

Trans Fats:

- *Trans* fats usually created as a result of the hydrogenation process.
- *Trans* fats can raise LDL-cholesterol and lower HDL-cholesterol ("good cholesterol").
- *Trans* fats are often found in cookies, crackers, donuts, French fries, and other processed baked/fried foods.
- As of January 2006, it is required that *trans* fats be listed on the food label.
- It is recommended that *trans* fats are avoided in the diet.

DIETARY FATS TO KEEP IN YOUR DIET

***Unsaturated* fats largely come from plant sources such as vegetable oils, nuts and seeds. Both monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats may lower your LDL-cholesterol levels when you use them in place of saturated fat or excess carbohydrate in the diet.**

Monounsaturated Fats:

- Monounsaturated fats do not lower HDL-cholesterol ("good" cholesterol), nor do they raise triglycerides.
- They are found in almonds, avocados, olives, peanuts, olive oil, peanut oil.
- Monounsaturated fats are listed on food labels. They are also liquid at room temperature, but will start to get solid in the refrigerator.

Polyunsaturated Fats:

- Polyunsaturated fats are found in fish, walnuts, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds.
- Omega-3 fatty acids are a type of polyunsaturated fat that is found in fish and some plant foods such as flaxseeds and walnuts.
    - Omega-3 fatty acids from fish have been associated with decreased triglyceride levels, decreased growth of atherosclerotic plaque, improved artery health, lower blood pressure and decreased tendency of the blood to clot.
- Polyunsaturated fats are listed on food labels. They are liquid at room temperature and in the refrigerator.

Good Oils to Choose:

- Read food labels: oils and margarines with no more than 2 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon are good choices. Examples are canola, olive, safflower, sesame, soybean, and sunflower oils.
- Choose liquid or tub margarines low in saturated fat and *trans* fat instead of butter or stick margarine. Tub margarines that contain *plant stanol/sterols* are also available and may help reduce LDL-cholesterol.

References:

1. National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) Expert Panel on Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Cholesterol in Adults (Adult Treatment Panel III). Third Report of the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) Expert Panel on Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Cholesterol in Adults (Adult Treatment Panel III) final report. *Circulation*. 2002;106:3143–3421.

2. American Heart Association. Fat. February 6, 2006. http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4582