

# Low-Fat Living

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Many nutrition authorities recommend that Americans over the age of 2 eat foods that are low in fat, saturated fatty acids, and cholesterol. Why? Because many Americans have high blood cholesterol levels, and high blood cholesterol levels tend to increase the risk of heart disease.

Eating a diet high in fat—especially saturated fatty acids and trans fats—and cholesterol raises blood cholesterol levels in many people. Populations like ours with diets high in fat also have more obesity and certain types of cancers.

Fat contains more than twice the food energy (calories) of an equal amount of carbohydrates or protein. By choosing foods that are lean or low in fat, you can get the nutrients you need with fewer calories.

## **Do I need any fat in my diet?**

Yes. In addition to supplying energy, fat helps your body absorb certain vitamins. Fats also provide essential fatty acids. Most diets, even those lower in fat, provide plenty of these essential fatty acids.

## **Does everyone need to choose a diet low in fat?**

No. The exception is children under 2 years of age. It is very important for their growth and development that children under 2 years NOT be put on diets low in fat. Additionally, it is debatable whether children and adolescents with normal weight and blood fat levels benefit from diets low in fat.

## **How do I know if I should be concerned about the fat in my diet?**

Two things determine whether you should be concerned: whether you are at a healthy weight and whether your blood

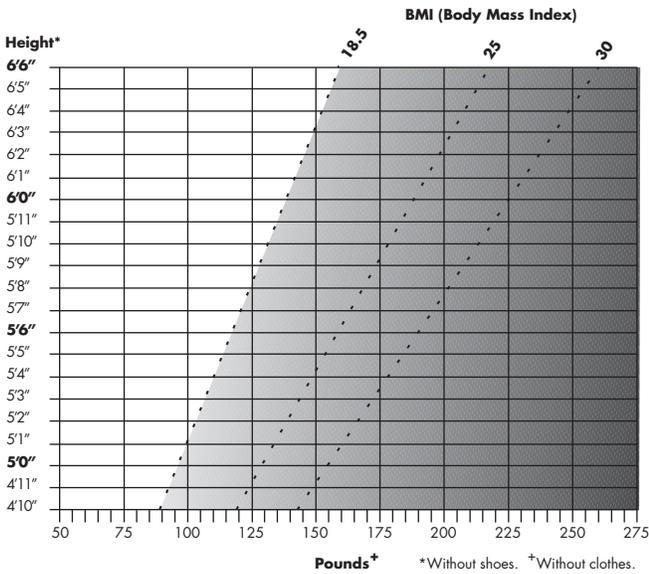
fat measurements are normal. To help you judge if your weight is healthy, answer the following three questions. Then see the next section to learn about blood fats.

## **Is your weight healthy?**

1. Is your weight within the healthy weight ranges suggested for adult men and women in the chart, “Are You at a Healthy Weight?” on the next page? Weight ranges are shown in the chart because people of the same height may have equal amounts of body fat but may have different amounts of muscle and bone. The higher weights in the healthy weight range apply to people with more muscle and bone.
2. Where is your body fat located? For adults, body shape as well as actual body weight is important to health. Adults with too much fat in the abdomen (stomach area) are at greater risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hypertension than adults whose fat is more concentrated in the hips and thighs. The easiest way to check your body fat distribution is to measure around your waistline with a tapemeasure and compare this with the measure around your hips or buttocks to see if your abdomen is larger. If you are in doubt, you may seek advice from a health professional.
3. Do you have a medical problem, such as abnormal blood fat measurements (see next section), for which your doctor advised you to lose weight?

If your weight is within the healthy range in the chart, if your body fat location does not place you at risk, and if you have no medical problem for which your doctor advises you

## Are You at a Healthy Weight?



BMI measures weight in relation to height. The BMI ranges shown above are for adults. They are not exact ranges of healthy and unhealthy weights. However, they show that health risk increases at higher levels of overweight and obesity. Even within the healthy BMI range, weight gains can carry health risks for adults.

Directions: Find your weight on the bottom of the graph. Go straight up from that point until you come to the line that matches your height. Then look to find your weight group.

- Healthy Weight** BMI from 18.5 to 25 refers to healthy weight.
- Overweight** BMI from 25 up to 30 refers to overweight.
- Obese** BMI 30 or higher refers to obesity. Obese persons are also overweight.

Source: Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2000, page 3

to lose weight, there appears to be no health advantage to changing your weight. If you do not meet all these conditions, or if you are unsure, talk to your doctor about how your weight might affect your health and what you should do about it.

## Are your blood fat measurements normal?

If you have not had a blood fat profile run, consider having one done at your next visit to your doctor. Then ask your doctor how often you should have this profile repeated. The tests should include total cholesterol, HDL, LDL (calculated), LDL to HDL ratio (calculated), and triglycerides. Discuss the results of each test with your doctor or other designated healthcare professionals. The following information is provided to help you understand the blood fat profile.

For adults, a total blood cholesterol level below 200 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dl) is desirable. As your total cholesterol increases above 200, so does your risk of developing heart disease.

Cholesterol is carried in your blood primarily by two different types of lipoproteins: high-density lipoproteins (HDL) and low-density lipoproteins (LDL). Lipoproteins (HDLs and LDLs) are not found in foods. Lipoproteins are packages of fat, cholesterol, and protein. HDLs contain more protein and less fat and cholesterol than LDLs. LDLs carry most of the cholesterol in the blood.

LDLs may be referred to as “bad” cholesterol. Actually, LDLs are essential. Only a high concentration of LDLs is bad, because LDLs tend to deposit cholesterol in the arteries. A high level of LDLs increases your risk of developing heart disease.

HDLs are often called “good” cholesterol. In fact, it is a high concentration of HDL that is good. A high HDL level tends to remove cholesterol from the arteries, helping to lessen your risk of heart disease.

Reducing saturated fatty acids and cholesterol in the diet helps lower LDL-cholesterol levels in your blood, reducing your risk of heart disease. HDLs appear to have a protective effect. You can generally raise HDL levels with exercise.

When your blood cholesterol levels are checked at your doctor’s office, you can also find out your triglyceride level. Triglycerides are fat. Most fat tissue is made of triglycerides, and when fat travels in the blood, it travels as triglycerides.

Researchers are not certain that high triglyceride levels are a risk factor for heart disease. However, if levels are high, most doctors will continue to recheck them to see if they come down.

In discussing your blood fat profile, your doctor may recommend specific changes in your diet. If so, ask for a referral to a registered dietitian who is qualified to assist you in making changes. If no specific diet order is made or if a general recommendation to cut down on dietary fat is given, then the material in this publication may help you.

If your blood fat measurements are in the normal range and your weight is at a healthy level, you are probably doing a good job of keeping the fat levels in your diet in a healthy range.

If you are trying to lose weight, do so slowly and steadily. A healthy low-fat diet, smaller food portion sizes, and increased physical activity are the keys to losing weight. A generally safe rate is 1/2 to 2 pounds a week until you reach your goal.

## What is low-fat living?

Low-fat living is limiting the amount of total fat in your daily diet. See the box on the next page to help you determine the approximate fat limit that is healthy for you.

## Don’t calories count anymore?

Yes, but fat is the most concentrated source of food energy (calories). Each gram of fat supplies about 9 calories compared with about 4 calories per gram for protein or carbohydrates and 7 calories per gram for alcohol.

One caution: Any food can be “fattening” if you eat enough of it. Even foods promoted as low in fat provide calories. You may be tempted to eat more of a food because it is low in fat. This may result in your getting as many calories from the low-fat version as from the regular version of the food.

## So how do I start low-fat living?

First, take a look at how much fat you already eat. Fill in the blanks on the “How do you score on fat?” chart (page 4).

If you find that you are eating more fat than you thought, see the next section for ways to cut down on the fat in your diet.

## How can I cut down on total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol?

1. Steam, boil, bake, or microwave vegetables rather than fry them. Or, for a change, stirfry in just a small amount (less than a teaspoon per serving) of vegetable oil.
2. Season foods with herbs, spices, onions, garlic, flavored vinegars, and high-quality mustard instead of fatty sauces, butter, or margarine.
3. Try flavored vinegars or lemon juice on salads or use smaller servings of oil-based salad dressings or salad dressings that are low in fat or fat free.
4. Use vegetable oil in place of solid shortening, margarine, and butter whenever possible. Try reducing the fat by one-third in muffins and cookies and replacing butter or margarine with applesauce, pureed banana, or pureed prunes.
5. Try whole-grain flours to enhance flavors of baked goods made with less fat- and lower-cholesterol ingredients.
6. Replace whole milk with skim milk or 2-percent milk in puddings, soups, sauces, and baked products. Use evaporated skim milk in place of cream. Use fat free or low-fat buttermilk in place of cream or whole milk in ranch dressing, muffins, and pancakes.
7. Substitute plain yogurt that is fat free or low fat; blender-whipped cottage cheese that is fat free or low fat; or part skim ricotta cheese for sour cream or mayonnaise.
8. Choose lean cuts of meat and trim fat from meat before or after cooking. Remove skin from poultry before or after cooking.
9. Roast, bake, broil, grill, steam, or simmer meat, poultry, or fish rather than fry it.
10. Cook meat or poultry on a rack so the fat will drain off. Use a nonstick pan for cooking so that added fat is unnecessary.

11. Chill meat or poultry broth until the fat becomes solid. Spoon off the fat before using the broth.

12. Limit egg yolks to one per serving when making scrambled eggs. Use additional egg whites for larger servings.

13. To lower cholesterol, try substituting egg whites in recipes calling for whole eggs. Use two egg whites in place of each whole egg in muffins, cookies, and puddings.

## What is low-fat living?

On the average, Americans eat a diet in which about 33 percent of the calories come from fat. This is too high for good health for some people.

The Dietary Guidelines suggest a goal of no more than 25 to 35 percent of total calories from fat. They also suggest limiting saturated fatty acids\* and trans fatty acids to less than 10 percent of calories.

In a diet with daily calories of...	Which is about right for...	The grams of total fat shown provide 30% of calories	The grams of saturated fatty acids shown provide 10% of calories*
1,600	Sedentary women, young children, and some older adults	53	18
2,200	Most children, teenage girls, active women, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and many sedentary men	73	24
2,800	Teenage boys, many active men, and some very active women	93	31

You also can figure the grams of fat and saturated fatty acids for any calorie level as follows:

1. Multiply calories per day by 0.30 (30%) to get calories from total fat per day.  
 $calories\ per\ day \times 0.30 = calories\ from\ total\ fat$

2. Divide the calories from total fat by 9 (calories in each gram of fat) to get grams of total fat per day.  
 $calories\ from\ fat \div 9 = grams\ of\ total\ fat$

3. Divide the grams of total fat per day by 3 to get grams of saturated fatty acids that would be provided by 10 percent of calories.  
 $grams\ of\ total\ fat \div 3 = grams\ of\ saturated\ fatty\ acids$

\*Saturated fatty acids are found in large proportions in fats of animal origin. These include the fats in whole milk, cream, cheese, butter, meat, and poultry. Saturated fatty acids also are found in large amounts in some vegetable fats, including coconut, palm kernel, and palm oils (often called “tropical oils”).

## How do you score on fat?

Do the foods you eat provide more fat than is good for you? Answer the questions below, then see how your diet stacks up.

*How often do you eat . . .*

	Seldom or never	1 or 2 times a week	3 to 5 times a week	Almost daily
1. fried, deep-fat-fried, or breaded foods?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. fatty meats such as sausage, luncheon meats, or heavily marbled steaks and roasts?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. whole milk, regular hard cheeses, or ice cream?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. high-fat desserts such as pies, pastries, or rich cakes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. rich sauces or gravies or regular salad dressings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. breads with lots of fat such as croissants or rich muffins?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. whipped cream, table cream, sour cream, or cream cheese?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. butter or margarine on vegetables, dinner rolls, or toast?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Take a look at your answers. If you have three or more responses in the last two columns, this indicates that you may have a high fat intake. You can cut back on the amount you eat as well as the number of times you eat fatty foods.

14. Substitute baked chips and pretzels for regular chips, snack crackers, party mixes, and other snacks high in fat.

15. Be careful not to serve a meal that is low in fat followed by a dessert that is high in fat. Examples of desserts that are low in fat are fresh fruit topped with light ice cream or low-fat frozen yogurt; sherbet; cookies that are lower in fat, such as gingersnaps; custard or pudding made with skim milk; and meringues filled with fruit.

## References

*Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005.*  
<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document>.  
 U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

*Choose a Diet Low in Fat, Saturated Fat, and Cholesterol,* Home and Garden Bulletin 253-4, Human Nutrition Information Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, July 1993.

*Maintain Healthy Weight,* Home and Garden Bulletin 253-3, Human Nutrition Information Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, July 1993.