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## Britain is baffled by dietary fat

New research shows that dietary fat is a conundrum that is foxing the nation. According to the results, education and awareness campaigns over many years appear to have had little impact on the public's understanding of this important nutrient. One in five of us still thinks that saturated fat is a 'good' fat and more than a **third** of the population thinks that trans fats (TFAs) are good for us.

This confusion over fat and the role it plays in the diet has been highlighted by a new research survey of 1,000 people commissioned by **The Fat Panel**.

The research found that:

- Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) think that saturated fat is a 'good' fat
- 1 in 10 (11%) don't realise that some fat is an important part of a healthy diet
- More than a third (36%) think that TFAs are 'good' fats; furthermore almost half (49%) think that TFAs are essential fatty acids
- 1 in 4 (28%) think that we need to be eating more TFAs
- Just under half (49%) realise that monounsaturated fats are 'good' fats
- More than 1 in 4 (28%) think we are eating the right amount of saturated fat
- More than a quarter (29%) do not understand that polyunsaturated fats are 'good' fats
- Nearly one in five (18%) do not realise that we need some fat in our diets to deliver vitamins A, D E and K effectively in the body

These findings highlight that, not only do people not realise that some dietary fat is essential, but they also have very little idea which fats are beneficial and which are potentially harmful to health. With so much misunderstanding, it is little wonder that so many poor dietary choices are being made.

### Fast Fat Facts

- Dietary fat in appropriate amounts is essential for:
  - Tissue repair
  - Healthy skin
  - Protecting the internal organs
  - Delivering and transporting vitamins around the body
  - Hormone metabolism
  - Normal growth and development
- 'Good' fats include:
  - Polyunsaturated fats (PUFAs)
  - Monounsaturated fats (MUFAs)

#### **Polyunsaturated fats (PUFAs)**

PUFAs are classified into two types - Omega-3 and Omega-6. There are just two 'parent' fatty acids that are considered essential because they can not be made in the body, and so must be obtained through the diet. One is called linoleic acid and is an omega 6 type, the other is alpha linoleic acid and is an omega 3 type.

Omega-6 fats are mainly found in sunflower, corn and most other pure vegetable oils, products made with these oils, nuts and seeds. Omega-6 PUFA help lower LDL ('bad') blood cholesterol levels when it replaces saturated fat in the diet, helping reduce the risk of developing heart disease.

There are two types of omega-3 fats: one type can be found in some vegetable oils such as flaxseed oil and rapeseed oil and some nuts; the other type is found in oil-rich fish such as sardines and salmon. Like omega-6, omega-3 (particularly from fish oils) is known to help keep the heart and circulation healthy.

### **Monounsaturated fats (MUFAs)**

MUFAs are found in significant amounts in most types of nuts, avocado pears, rapeseed oil, olive oil and products made from these. It does not raise blood cholesterol and evidence shows that it can help lower LDL ('bad') blood cholesterol levels when it replaces saturated fat in the diet.

- Potentially harmful fats include:
  - Saturated fats
  - Trans fats (otherwise known as trans fatty acids or TFAs)

### **Saturated fat**

Saturated fat is typically found in foods derived from animals, e.g. full fat dairy products such as butter, full fat cheese and cream and fatty meats and meat products. Many baked goods such as cakes, biscuits and pastries are also high in saturated fat. Excessive intakes of saturated fat can increase blood cholesterol levels, a risk factor for heart disease. Current figures suggest that we are, on average, consuming 20% more saturated fat than experts recommend.

### **Trans fats**

Trans fats, or trans fatty acids (TFAs) in our diet come mainly from two sources. TFAs are formed when liquid oils are hardened by a process called partial hydrogenation; the other source of TFAs is naturally occurring in some meat and dairy food. The most common dietary sources of TFAs in the UK are biscuits, cakes, meat pies and pastries. TFAs raise LDL 'bad' blood cholesterol and also reduce HDL 'good' blood cholesterol, increasing the risk of heart disease.

Dr Sarah Berry from The Fat Panel says; "These results really underline just how much confusion is out there about dietary fat. After so many years of education and awareness raising, it's really shocking that people are still so mystified.

"Fat is often considered the 'baddie' of our diet, with many people trying to cut it out completely. However, a moderate amount of the right kind of fat is important to health and an essential part of our diet. Checking out our web site, [TheFatPanel.org.uk](http://TheFatPanel.org.uk) is a good start for anyone who has any questions about fat."

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