



Newsletter

All the latest on fat related issues.

Welcome

On average, we are each eating 20% too much saturated fat every day and there is overwhelming evidence that eating too much saturated fat can increase levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol in the body, which increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.

In order to help people to cut their saturated fat intake, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is launching an education and awareness campaign w/c 9/2/09 to help people understand about saturated fat, what it does to the body, what foods contain a lot and how some simple changes in your choice of foods can hugely affect how much you eat.



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Saturated with fat?

For decades, experts have known that too much saturated fat is bad for our health. There is considerable evidence that excessive consumption of saturated fat can increase levels of bad cholesterol in the body, which increases the risk of cardiovascular disease. Research from The Fat Panel surprisingly shows that nearly half of us do not realise that it is so bad for our health, however.

One in seven does not realise that reducing intake of saturated fat can cut the risk of developing coronary heart disease. Strangely, nearly one quarter of us (22%) thinks that reining in saturated fat consumption will improve our love lives, however! If only....

This latest research re-enforces The Fat Panel's belief that Brits do not understand enough about fats and which are good or bad for health. On average, we are eating 20% too much saturated fat and this is a major risk for developing cardiovascular disease. Now, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is launching a major new campaign to help the nation reduce its intake of saturated fat and energy. Dr Sarah Berry of The Fat Panel says 'I think it's a major concern that people do not understand the health effects of eating too much saturated fat. Many health professionals have been extremely concerned about people's intake of saturated fat for some time and this is supported by a wealth of clinical evidence. Now the Government is shining a spotlight on this harmful fat. If we are to reasonably expect to reduce the amount of saturated fat that people are eating, however, we need to help people understand saturated fat and why it is bad for health'.

To make things even more difficult, there is a lot of public confusion over which foods are high in saturated fat and, therefore, which ones to avoid or cut down on. More than one third of those questioned in the research (35%) believes that sunflower oil is high in saturated fat (it contains just 12%), and more than one quarter thinks that rapeseed oil is high in this bad fat (it contains just 8% saturated fat). Most people do realise, however, that butter contains high levels (91%), although nearly

one in ten does not. One in eight (12%) does not think cakes and biscuits have a high saturated fat content and one in 10 are unaware of meat products, meat pies and sausages containing high levels. Sian Porter of The Fat Panel says 'If people are going to make educated choices with their shopping and eating they need to, not only, realise that saturated fat is something they need to cut out or down on in their diet, but they also need to be able to identify which foods contain high levels. The Fat Panel is providing the accurate information and advice people need to help them make sensible choices'.

Recent improvements in food labelling should help people make these choices, but it's up to individuals to remember to look at on-pack labels. Just half of us look at labels when buying butter or spreads for instance and only one in six look at how much saturated fat is in the pack.

So, broadly speaking, which are the goodies and the baddies when it comes to saturated fat?

It's difficult to give blanket statements when it comes to saturated fat. The Food Standards Agency states that 'High' is more than 5g saturates per 100g of food and 'Low' is 1.5g saturates or less per 100g. If the amount of saturates per 100g is in between these figures, then that is a medium level of saturated fat. Portion size and the brand you choose can make a huge difference to saturated fat content. Manufacturers are constantly seeking ways to reduce the saturated fat content in their foods.

Usually, saturated fat is hard at room temperature, so lard and dripping are big culprits. The fat on many meats is high in saturated fat too, so trim your cuts before you cook. Full-fat dairy foods, including butter, are high in saturated fat so use vegetable oils and spreads where you can. Some pastries, biscuits and cakes are also guilty of being high in saturated fat, so check the labels on packaging whenever you can.

How much SAFA in oils and butter?

- Rapeseed oil 8%
- Sunflower oil 12%
- Corn/maize oil 14%
- Soyabean oil 16%
- Olive oil 15%
- Butter 54%

Featured Profile



Dr Anne Marie Minihane, BSc, PhD

Anne Marie is a nutritional biochemist, and a Reader in Integrative Nutrition at the Hugh Sinclair Nutrition Unit, University of Reading. Her PhD training was in the area of micronutrients absorption, in particular iron and calcium. Following her PhD she joined the '*world of lipids*' and investigation of the impact of dietary fat composition on the risk of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, has been her core research activity over the past 10 years.

In recent years Anne Marie and her group, have conducted a large amount of nutrigenetics research, investigating the role of an individual's genetic make-up on their response to dietary change. The ultimate goal of this type of research is in the future to provide individuals with more personalised dietary recommendations.

In addition to research, she gives a large number of presentations each year at scientific conferences, to industrial partners and to the general public (through initiatives such as café Scientifique). Furthermore she has acted as consultant and advisor to a number of industrial partners and policy makers.

As a nutritionist Anne-Marie believes in taking a realistic balanced approach, always remembering that food is a pleasure in addition to being a source of nutrients. As far as food is concerned, a little of what you fancy never killed anyone; it is when you have a lot of what you fancy that the trouble begins!

Fat Feature

Reducing Saturated Fat: the personal experience of Dr Pamela Mason

Like many of us these days, I am concerned about the effect my diet can have on my health. Saturated fat is a particular issue for me, not only because I have, until recently, eaten more than the amounts of saturated fat recommended for health, but also because of the cardiovascular risk in my family.

You may think I'm lucky in relation to saturated fat because I have never enjoyed what might be described as 'fatty food' such as 'fry ups', though I do occasionally, (probably no more than a couple of times of year) enjoy egg and bacon when staying in a bed and breakfast. During recent years, chips, fries and roast potatoes have not featured hugely in my diet - probably no more than half a dozen times a year for the three items in total, and I invariably cut all fat off meat and skin off chicken.

Yet, when I did a quick calculation and began to scrutinise the labels of foods I was eating, I found that I was still obtaining more than the recommended 11 per cent of my calories from saturated fat. Eleven per cent of calories from saturated fat equates to approximately 20g of saturated fat daily and, on average, I had an approximate saturated fat intake of between 25 and 30g daily. Up to twice as much as I should!

The main culprits were cheese, which I used to eat on most days, ready-packed sandwiches (only because I did not read the labels), chocolate and a couple of take-aways each week. Add to this, hog roasts, cakes and puddings (with cream) eaten at summer fetes and the like, which because we lived in village, could be monthly or more often.

So, what have I changed? Over the last couple of years - and yes, it has taken that long - I have returned to cooking as much as possible from scratch. Given that I work at home, this is quite easy to do, and you do have to be organised. Ten minutes spent first thing in the morning putting an evening meal into the slow cooker helps a lot, and you can just as easily do this before going off to work. Even if recipes call for frying ingredients first, I avoid this as it saves both time and saturated fat.

I used to drink semi-skimmed milk, but given that I drink quite a lot of milk, I have found the newer 1% fat milk quite useful. It tastes much the same as semi-skimmed but saves me 3 grams of saturated fat a day, which in the context of a recommended intake of no more than 20g daily, is significant.

Cheese is something I reserve for when we have friends for dinner, and even then I buy small amounts so there isn't a lot left. On the rare occasions when I use cheese in cooking, I either go for a lower fat variety or use a very small amount of a strong tasting cheese and bulk it up, depending on the recipe, with plenty of vegetables. Using 50g of low fat cheese rather than 50g of ordinary cheese saves about 5g of saturated fat while using 25g of a strong tasting cheese rather than 50g of a milder cheese will achieve roughly the same 5g saving in saturated fat, which is significant.

I have also replaced most of the cheese meals I used to eat with home-made soup, or snacks made with grains (e.g. bulgur wheat, pasta, couscous, rice) and pulses (eg, chick peas, beans and lentils). You can buy similar combinations ready made, but it's important to check the labels. Depending on what you are eating the rest of the day, you may not want to go for a lunch providing more than 5g of saturated fat.

Chocolate is a difficult one, I must admit. When I read the label of my favourite dark chocolate and found that 4 squares contains 4g of saturated fat, my daily evening treat got cut back to twice a week. If I'm going out somewhere where there will be snacks served, I eat before I go, then stick to the raw vegetables and perhaps one 'treat' item.

When buying sandwiches and similar takeaway food, I check the labels and buy accordingly, and I tend not to eat pastry mainly because I don't enjoy it.

I am not a big bread eater and much of the bread I do eat, I have plain without any spread or butter. But when I do spread something on my bread, it is usually a low fat spread, thinly spread. All margarine and spread is at least 25% lower in saturated fat than butter and some contain much less with certain spreads offering up to 83% less saturated fat. I reserve butter for the occasional baked potato, though I do enjoy

plain yogurt as a more frequent alternative.

Eating out can also be difficult, and avoiding chips does not necessarily mean that your meal is low in saturated fat. In fact, an average portion of fish and chips can be lower in saturated fat than an average portion of lasagne, quiche, pizza or chicken tikka masala.

So, what has been the outcome of my saturated fat journey? Well, I have cut my intake down below 20g daily. It has taken time to plan meals and shopping, not to mention reading food labels, but having made the changes gradually, it has now become a way of life - and an enjoyable one.

(This article represents the author's personal saturated fat food journey and is not intended to be a recommendation to others whose eating patterns may be very different).

Your Feedback



We value your feedback. Let us know what you think!

[Click here to post feedback on this topic](#)

Fat Vote

What is the Guideline Daily Amount for saturated fat intake in women?

- [- 20 grams per day](#)
- [- 30 grams per day](#)
- [- 40 grams per day](#)

Top tips for cutting saturated fat

- Grill, bake, poach or steam rather than frying and roasting
- Use little or no extra fat when cooking. Use a non-stick pan. Measure oil with a tablespoon rather than pouring it straight from the bottle. Or, use a spray oil to cook
- Limit consumption of butter, lard and ghee as these are rich sources of saturated fat. Replace with small amounts of unsaturated fats such as rapeseed oil, olive oil, sunflower oil and corn oil or spreads made from these
- Choose lean cuts of meat and trim off any visible fat. Have chicken or turkey without the skin. Cut right back on processed meats such as spam, salami and corned beef and meat pies, sausage rolls and breaded meat or chicken. Fish tends to be low in saturated fat too - unless it's deep-fried or in a rich, creamy sauce of course!
- Add less meat to stews and casseroles and replace with vegetables, beans and pulses
- Read labels on food products so you can choose those with less saturated fat - some labels show exactly how much saturated fat is in a portion
- Have pies with only one crust rather than two - either a lid or a base - because pastry is very high in fat
- Using spreads instead of butter can substantially reduce the saturated fat you are eating because all spreads contain at least 25 per cent less saturated fat than butter with some offering up to 83 per cent less
- Choose lower fat versions of dairy produce such as skimmed, 1% or semi-skimmed milk, reduced fat yogurt, lower fat cheeses (eg, cottage cheese and fromage frais) or strong tasting cheese so you don't need to use so much

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