

**Diane Cook and Martha Lindsay**

## **The Fats of Life**

Fats from animal and vegetable sources provide the building blocks for cell membranes and act as carriers for fat soluble vitamins A, D, E and K. Fats as part of a meal slow down nutrient absorption so that we can go longer without feeling hungry (1). You may have been told that eating fat makes you fat, however, excess calories from carbohydrates are responsible for that.

### **Types of Fat**

**Monounsaturated**: The main component of olive oil and sesame oil, and in almonds, pecans, cashews, peanuts and avocados. Your body can make monounsaturated fatty acids from saturated fatty acids when it needs them for various bodily functions.

**Polyunsaturated**: The main component of vegetable oils. They easily oxidize when heated or exposed to air, form free radicals and become rancid quickly. Free radicals can contribute to many health problems, including heart disease, cancer, arthritis, diabetes, allergies, high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, dermatitis, digestive problems, reproductive problems and poor memory (5).

**Essential fatty acids** (EFAs): These are fatty acids your body cannot manufacture and must be obtained from food. There are two types of EFAs: Omega 3 and Omega 6. Omega 6 (linoleic acid) is especially high in nuts and seeds. Omega 3 (linolenic acid) is found in flaxseed, green leaves, some grains and seeds, walnuts, chia, many fish oils, grass-fed free-range animal meats and organs, oysters and shrimp (3,4).

**Saturated**: These are found in animal fats, eggs and tropical oils. These fats do not become rancid easily when heated so are good for cooking. These are usually solid at room temperature. They include coconut and palm oils, butter, lard, egg yolks and other animal fats. These natural saturated fats have been incorrectly blamed for the problems caused by man-made saturated fats (see Trans-fats). Many studies have been done to prove the value of saturated fats (1, 2, 3, 5).

**Trans-Fats**: Trans-fatty acids are fat molecules produced by the “partial hydrogenation” of unsaturated fats to produce unnatural saturated fat. Trans-fats are inexpensive to produce so are commonly used in food businesses for frying and to make cookies, crackers and other baked goods.

**Trans-fats** do not behave like natural saturated fats in the body. Trans-fats cause cellular destruction and continued use can lead to higher blood sugar levels, decreased HDL, increased LDL, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, low birth rate, obesity and immune dysfunction (2, 3, 5). The only way to avoid trans-fats is to avoid processed food products and fried foods that you do not prepare yourself (4).

**Choose Healthy Fats:** Use more saturated fats: fresh butter, cream, meat and eggs from organic grass-fed free-range animals and natural oils like coconut and palm oils. Eat a variety of nuts and seeds. Use coconut oil for baking, frying, mixed into your oatmeal, on your vegetables and even as a skin cream (5).

## **Resources**

1. Nourishing Traditions, Sally Fallon, New Trends Publishing, 2001.
2. Eat Fat Lose Fat, Mary G. Enig & Sally Fallon, Plume/ Penguin Group, 2005.
3. Know Your Fats: The Complete Primer for Cholesterol, Mary G. Enig, PhD., 2000.
4. Nutrition News and Views, Judith A. DeCava, “Focus on Fats – Part 1”, Vol. 14 No.2, March/April 2011.
5. The Coconut Oil Miracle, Bruce Fife N.D., Penguin Group, 2004.