



Chapter 6

Don't be afraid of fats - Just Get Oil Smart

Are you constantly on a hunt for foods that are fat free? And when you hear the word "fat," do you automatically think bad? If yes, you couldn't be more wrong. Not our fault actually! Dietary policies worldwide for decades continuously branded fat as a villain, a vile food ingredient responsible for all the bad that happens to our body.

In 1990s in fact the market was flooded with low-fat products: non-fat salad dressing, baked potato chips, low-fat milk and yogurt and more such. And due to this conscious cutting down of fat from the diet, our consumption of carbohydrates increased substantially and our plate became completely unbalanced. This is one of the cause which has led to an increase in the lifestyle diseases worldwide.

Thankfully now the tide is turning and it is becoming increasingly clear that fat is not devil, in fact its intake is imperative for health, as long as we choose the right kind and quantity. Sure, some fats are still bad, and too much of any kind is harmful to our waist and health (when it comes to calories, all fats deliver 9 calories per gram), so the trick is to consume the right kind of fat in an appropriate amount and choose the good fats over the bad.

Know Good fat vs. Bad fat

Replace bad fats with good fats. And beware just adding a little good fat to an already bad diet does not work as good fat works best when it replaces bad fat. For that it is important to understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy.

Poly Unsaturated Fatty Acids

PUFA are primarily of two types: omega 6, and omega 3. They are called essential fatty acids (EFA's) because we cannot live without them, and the body cannot make them indigenously, like vitamins, minerals and other essential nutrients, we must get them from the foods we eat. While we need both omega-3s and omega-6s, an imbalance between them can lead to inflammation in the body (bad for our health). The ideal ratio of essential fatty acid, linoleic acid (omega- 6): linolenic acid (omega - 3) should be 5- 10:1 but today the ratio stands around 15:1, that is we are consuming way too much of omega 6 which is extremely unhealthy. Excess usage of visible fats and processed foods (like chips, pakoras, French fries etc.) that we consume are to be blamed for this.

Balance it: with enough consumption of omega 3, found in fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, tuna, surmayi, singhara, hilsa, rohu), walnuts, flaxseeds (alsi seeds), and greens like methi and mustard leaves.

Monounsaturated Fatty Acids

Along with PUFA, MUFAs too health benefits. These important fats help lower bad LDL cholesterol and raise good HDL cholesterol.

Zero in: on high MUFA oils - olive, flaxseed, almond, sesame, peanut and cashew. Olives, dark chocolate, peanut butter, almonds, cashews, pistachios, peanuts and seeds like sesame, pumpkin, poppy, chia and flax are other good sources of MUFA.

Saturated Fatty Acids (SFA)

Stop banning unsalted butter and ghee from your diet. These are not devil. The mantra is to take them in moderate amounts.

Look out: SFA are found in found in red meat, poultry, butter, cheese, full-fat dairy products, coconut oil, palm oil and ghee.

Bad Fat, the Trans Fats

As discussed in previous chapter it is important to keep an eye out for this meanest of all fats. They are dangerous as they increase 'bad' LDL cholesterol and triglycerides, and reduce 'good' HDL cholesterol (terrible for our heart), and also trigger diabetes, immune dysfunction, obesity reproductive problems and cancer and have been linked to poor memory too.

Be careful: they are there almost everywhere - cookies, crackers, cake icing, potato, corn and tortilla chips, many types of packaged or microwave popcorn, doughnuts, baked goods, margarines, and other processed foods, and of course all fried food - samosas, pakoras, kachoris, French fries, doughnuts and fried chicken, even fried sweets like gulab jamuns. jalebis... as they are often cooked in partially hydrogenated oils. So be careful. By the way another name for trans fats is "partially hydrogenated oils", so steer clear of the vanaspati's too. (Read the chapter 5 on trans fats for more details).

**Use combination of fats
and oils but with
moderation.**



Choose oils carefully

There is an ever-expanding choice of oils at your local grocery store over the past few years. Each of these oils has its place in the kitchen and serves a specific function. Keep these factors in mind when choosing them:

No oil is completely made of one fatty acid; they all are a combination of the three kinds of fats (MUFA, PUFA and SFA) in different percentages, based on the nut, seed or fruit from which the oil is derived, so it makes sense to keep rotating them.

Consider the smoke point (the temperature at which volatile compounds emerge and a bluish smoke becomes clearly visible from the oil) of the oil. Heating oil past its smoke point leads to a loss of flavor, its nutritional value and also toxic compounds which are bad for health. Oils that can take high temperatures make good all purpose cooking oils e.g. mustard, safflower, sunflower, and peanut oil. Medium-high heat oils are good for baking, sautéing and stir-frying e.g. butter, coconut oil,. For sauces, lower-heat baking and pressure cooking, medium-high heat oils are best.

There are some oils that should never be heated; these can be used in dips and dressings, or added to a dish after it has been removed from heat. These oils are a good way to incorporate essential fatty acids into our diet.

A teaspoon or two of cold-pressed oils can also go a long way to complete your good fat requirement. These are obtained by pressing the fruit or seed naturally and as the temperature does not rise too high, they are far healthier compared to refined options ones (where the extraction process breaks down the natural composition of oils due to processing at high temperature).



Oils and Fats - Myths and Facts

Myth: Margarine contains less fat than butter.

Fact: Butter and margarine contain different types of fat, but in similar amounts and hence also have an equal number of calories. In fact, unsalted butter is usually the healthier option - of course in limited quantities - as most margarines (particularly the hard varieties) although free of saturated fats have trans fats. Secondly, butter contains the usual vitamins found in milk - which are fat soluble, the fat in the butter helps your body absorb them well and margarine is generally devoid of vitamins unless they are specially added during production.

Myth: Salad dressing should be totally fat-free

Fact: Salad veggies are filled with terrific nutrients such as lycopene and beta carotene. But these antioxidants are better absorbed with a little help from fat.

This doesn't mean you should drown your greens in a rich ranch or blue-cheese dressing: A small amount of olive oil or any cold pressed oil will be sufficient. Or you can add low-fat cheese, nuts, seeds or avocado.

Myth: Fat-free is low-calorie

Fact: Don't indulge in extra-large servings of fat-free foods, especially baked goodies such as cookies, cakes and crackers - these foods may contain the same amount or even more calories than regular versions! That's because manufacturers usually add other things to compensate for the taste and texture that fats give to the dish, and that something is often a sugary or floury substance - empty calories! So, in fact certain foods labelled, as low fat may actually be high in calorie because of high sugar or carbohydrate content. Always get the details by checking labels for the serving size and number of calories per serving.

Myth: The 'cholesterol free' label means a healthy food

Fact: 'Cholesterol free' doesn't necessarily mean fat free. The food might well be cholesterol free but at the same time be rich in saturated fatty acids or trans fatty acids, both of which raises blood cholesterol. 'Cholesterol free' is just a marketing strategy.

