



# Six Reasons to Put a Little Fat in Your Diet

*Some consumers think that all fat is bad. In truth, fats perform many vital roles in the human body. Fats help keep us warm and provide energy. In foods, fats carry flavors, aromas and the fat-soluble vitamins. Two types of fat found in canola oil are needed for health. It is time for consumers to hear some good news about fat!*

For nearly two decades, North Americans have been told to eat less fat. Low-fat diets are linked with reduced risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity. In the drive to get fat out, an important message has been lost - some fat is needed in the diet for good health. In foods, fat carries flavors and promotes tenderness. In the human body, fat cushions delicate organs and provides energy to keep the body warm and for physical work. Some dietary fats are essential, meaning they must be eaten in foods because our bodies cannot make them. Here are six good reasons why everyone needs some fat in their daily diet.

## Reasons Why Fat is Important in the Diet

### 1. Fat is a Building Block

Just like the steel girders in a skyscraper or the two-by-fours that frame a house, fat is a building block of all cells in the human body. Fat in the form of phospholipids is the basic structure of cells. Phospholipids control the passage of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients into and out of the body's cells; and they control how proteins, immune cells and hormones bind to cells. Phospholipids act as emulsifiers, helping to keep fats mixed in body fluids like blood.

### 2. Fat is a Starting Material for Hormones and Cholesterol

Sterols are a type of fat found in both plant and animal foods. Canola oil contains several plant sterols, which may help lower blood cholesterol levels.

In the human body, many important compounds are sterols, including vitamin D, which is needed for bone growth; bile, which acts like an emulsifier

to help digest fats and oils; the sex hormones such as estrogen and testosterone; and other hormones like cortisol. Cholesterol is also a sterol. Although cholesterol is found in animal foods, the human body also makes cholesterol. In the body, cells use cholesterol as a building material and for making sex hormones and vitamin D.

### 3. Fat Helps Absorb Essential Vitamins

Fat-soluble vitamins - vitamins A, D, E and K - and the carotenoids (β-carotene, lycopene and lutein) are found in the fats and oils of foods. The body absorbs these essential nutrients better when the diet contains some fat. Indeed, adding a little fat to cooked vegetables helps in digesting and absorbing the carotenoids. The carotenoids are found in fruit and vegetables, which are naturally low in fat. As little as 5 grams of fat in a meal - the amount of fat found in one teaspoon (5mL) of canola oil - ensures that carotenoids in the meal are digested and absorbed.

### 4. Some Fats are Essential

Fats are made up of smaller units called fatty acids. Two fatty acids are essential in our diet because our bodies cannot make them. The essential fatty acids are alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), an omega-3, and linoleic acid (LA), an omega-6. These polyunsaturated fatty acids play important roles in the normal operation of the body's cells.

Canola oil is a very good source of ALA in the North American diet. Women who eat as little as one tablespoon (15mL) of canola oil daily get the full-recommended amount of ALA. Men who add one tablespoon (15mL) of canola oil to their daily diet get 80% of their recommended intake of ALA. Canola oil also provides LA in the North American

**How much fat should I eat daily to achieve a diet that provides between 20% and 35% of energy from fat?**

If you consume this many calories (energy) daily...	Eat this number of grams of fat daily to achieve a diet providing 20% to 35% of energy from fat
1,500 kcal	33 to 58 grams
2,000 kcal	44 to 78 grams
2,500 kcal	56 to 97 grams
3,000 kcal	67 to 117 grams
3,500 kcal	78 to 136 grams



### References

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diet. One tablespoon (15mL) of canola oil daily provides about one-quarter of a woman's recommended intake of LA and about one-fifth of a man's intake.

### 5. Fat is a Flavor Carrier

Fat influences flavor. Fats like vegetable oils, margarines and shortenings add some flavor directly to foods. They also help blend flavors that are soluble in fat like spices and herbs. Because taste is the number one reason why consumers eat certain foods, a little added fat can help a vegetable stir-fry, spinach salad or sautéed fish taste better.

### 6. Some Fats Help Control Blood Glucose

People with type 2 diabetes usually eat diets low in fat and high in carbohydrates to control their blood glucose. Carbohydrates are found in fruit, vegetables, whole grains and cereals. One concern about high-carbohydrate diets is that they can increase insulin in the blood. Insulin is the hormone that regulates blood glucose. Too much insulin in the bloodstream makes it hard to control blood glucose.

New research shows that when people with type 2 diabetes ate diets rich in monounsaturated fats — diets where monounsaturated fats were substituted for saturated fats — their blood glucose and blood insulin remained stable. Thus, diets rich in monounsaturated fats appear to be a good alternative to low-fat diets in the treatment of type 2 diabetes. The main sources of monounsaturated fats are vegetable oils like canola and olive oils and some nuts like peanuts.

### How Much Fat is Needed in the Diet?

Many North Americans eat too much fat. Because high-fat diets contribute to overweight, obesity and other chronic diseases, the Institute of Medicine recommends a fat intake between 20% and 35% of energy for adults. This translates into a daily intake of between 33 and 136 grams fat, depending on your energy intake. (Consult the table for information on fat intakes.) A 45-year-old woman who walks two miles every day to lose weight might have an energy intake of about 2,000 Kcal and a daily fat allowance of 45-78 grams (20-35% of a 2,000 Kcal diet). Very active college-aged men might have energy intakes of 3,500 Kcal, with a daily fat allowance of 78-136 grams.

The key to healthy eating, whether for weight loss, weight maintenance or reducing your risk of chronic disease, is to choose the type of fat eaten and to eat lower fat foods and smaller portion sizes. Reading food labels helps in counting the fat grams eaten over the course of the day.

### Moderation is Key

Many North Americans can benefit from eating less fat. Moderation is the key, even for consumers who are working to lose weight. Diets too low in fat are not healthy. Athletes, for example, are advised to avoid diets with less than 15% of energy from fat because they provide no performance benefits over higher fat diets. For healthy overweight and obese adults, eating a diet containing a moderate amount of fat (about 30% of energy) results in better blood lipid profiles and reduced risk of heart disease compared with eating a low-fat diet (about 18% of energy from fat). Extremely low levels of dietary fat (<15%) may not be healthy or practical. Most consumers should aim for a diet providing about 20-35% of energy from fat.

For more information  
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