

Nutrition 101

Some Fat is Good for You

Fat is a vital nutrient that your body needs for a wide range of biological processes, including growth, healthy skin, and absorption of nutrients. It's also an important fuel source. Eating the right fats, in moderation, will help you feel full faster, and in turn, decrease your appetite. They can even help *lower* your risk of heart disease by reducing your levels of total and LDL ("bad") cholesterol.

- **Good.** Mono- and poly-unsaturated fats and omega-3 fatty acids (from coldwater fish, nuts, flaxseed oil) are healthy.
- **Bad.** Saturated fat and trans fat (from animal products and processed foods) can be harmful.
- **Disease alert.** Saturated and trans fats can *increase* your risk of heart disease by increasing your total and LDL cholesterol.

Protein is More Than Just Meat

Protein is a key component of practically every tissue in your body, including muscle, skin, hair, and other tissues. Proteins manufacture the enzymes and hormones that power digestion, metabolism, and tissue growth and repair.

Protein can be found in all meats and vegetables. Some are "complete" proteins (typically from animals) because they contain all the essential amino acids your body needs to build more protein. Others are "incomplete" proteins (vegetables, nuts) because they lack one or more essential amino acids.

- **Good.** Lean cuts of meat, white poultry meat, whey protein, soy protein, nuts (in moderation), beans, reduced fat dairy products (or dairy substitutes).
- **Bad.** Fatty cuts of meat, dark poultry meat, excess cheese or "whole" dairy product consumption, poultry skins.
- **Caution.** Even lean protein sources can be prepared in unhealthy ways—battered, deep fried, or covered in fatty sauces or cheeses.

Carbohydrates: the Key to Healthy Eating

Carbohydrates are important sources of energy and can be found in most foods. Not all carbohydrates are beneficial, so choosing the right carbohydrates is essential.

- **Good.** Better sources of carbohydrates are whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and beans. These foods are a good source of energy and provide fiber, vitamins, and minerals—as well as phytonutrients that are essential for good health.

- **Bad.** Refined carbohydrates or sugars (white bread, white rice, pastries, sugary sodas) provide little or no nutritional value.
- **Caution.** Even the best carbs can be prepared in bad ways. Overcooking can deplete nutrients, or they can be covered in cheese, butter, and fatty/sugary sauces that counteract their benefits.
- **Disease Alert.** Over time, a steady intake of refined carbohydrates can lead to insulin resistance, a harmful condition in which the body can't properly convert blood sugar into energy. Insulin resistance, in turn, can result in weight gain, low energy levels, diabetes, heart disease, and other health conditions.

Fiber and Water: Filling You Up and Cleaning You Out

Good sources of fiber include bran, beans, brown rice and nuts, and green vegetables (broccoli, asparagus, spinach). Your health care provider may also recommend a fiber supplement.

Dietary fiber helps:

- Promote healthy insulin and blood sugar response by slowing digestion, which helps to prevent a surge of blood sugar.
- Create a feeling of fullness, helping you control the amount of food you eat.
- Increase bowel motility, helping you empty what your body doesn't need more regularly.
- **Disease alert.** Low fiber diets can increase the risk to insulin resistance, digestive discomfort, and more serious intestinal concerns.