Facts on Fats and Oils

Oils are fats that are liquid at room temperature, like the vegetable oils used in cooking. Some oils are mainly used as flavorings, such as walnut oil and sesame oil. Oils come from many different plants and from fish. Some common oils are:

- Canola oil
- Corn oil
- Olive oil
- Safflower oil
- Soybean oil
- Sunflower oil

There are certain foods that are naturally high in oils, like:

- Nuts
- Olives
- Some fish
- Avocados

Oils

Most oils are high in unsaturated fats, the type of fat that is better for you, and low in saturated fats, the fats you want to eat less of. There are a few plant oils that are high in saturated fats, like coconut oil and palm kernel oil. Oils from plant sources (vegetable and nut oils) do not contain any cholesterol.

Cholesterol is a waxy substance produced in the liver that can cause heart disease. Dietary cholesterol is found in foods like full fat dairy products, fatty meats, egg yolks, and shellfish. The body produces enough cholesterol on its own, so it needs as little additional cholesterol from food sources as possible to stay healthy.

Solid Fats

Solid fats are those that are solid at room temperature, like butter and shortening. Solid fats tend to contain more saturated fats, and cholesterol. These are things that cause “bad” cholesterol levels in the blood to rise. Too much “bad” cholesterol in the blood can build up on the walls of the arteries that lead to the heart and the brain. Solid fats come from many animal foods and can be made from vegetable oil through a process called hydrogenation. To lower the risk for heart disease, your family should cut back on foods containing saturated fats, and cholesterol. Some common solid fats are:

- Butter
- Beef fat
- Chicken fat
- Pork fat
• Stick margarine
• Shortening

**Importance of Oils**
Consuming oils is important for your family’s health because oils contain “essential fatty acids.” There is an allowance for oils in MyPyramid separate from discretionary calories because they contain these acids. The fatty acids in fish, nuts, and vegetable oils do not raise bad cholesterol levels. In addition to the fatty acids, oils are a major source of vitamin E in typical American diets. Fats also help to protect the organs, keep the body warm and help the body absorb and move nutrients. They also help hormone production.

Although consuming oils is important to your family’s health, oils still contain calories. There are about 120 calories per tablespoon of fats and oil. Your family should try to limit the amount of calories they consume from fats and oils in order to balance out their total calorie intake.

**Daily Allowance of Oils**
There is a small daily oil allowance in MyPyramid, which includes the oil naturally found in food or used in food preparation. The allowance ranges from 2-6 teaspoons. The important thing to remember is that daily oil intake should be kept small.

**Tips for Cutting the Fat**
Here are some tips for limiting the amount of fats in the daily diet, particularly saturated fats.

- Use margarine spreads instead of butter or daily blends.
- Use salad dressings and mayonnaise made from oils such as canola, sunflower, soy and olive oils.
- Use low-fat or fat-free dairy products or “calcium added” soy products.
- Limit full-fat cheese and ice cream to twice a week.
- Try to have fish at least twice a week.
- Select lean poultry and meats.
- Snack on plain, unsalted nuts and fresh fruits.
- Incorporate dried peas, beans, or lentils into two meals a week.
- Limit snack foods such as potato chips to once a week or less.
- Limit cakes, cookies, and pastries to once a week or less.
- Limit cholesterol-rich foods such as egg yolks to a few times a week.