

copha

butter

margarine

cream

the fat files

They may have a bad reputation, but not all fats are bad for you. Nutrition editor CATHERINE SAXELBY explains how to make the healthiest choices for your cooking

✿ saturated

These are what are commonly known as “bad” fats, because they raise blood cholesterol and clog arteries. Fats that are rich in saturates are more solid at room temperature. They need to be stored in the fridge to prevent them from spoiling.

butter

53% saturated fat

made from cream.

used in pastries, biscuits, cakes, hollandaise and bearnaise sauces, quick-pan sauces, lemon curd, and for pan-frying and mashed potato.

pros Less processed than margarine, it's a good source of fat-soluble vitamins A and D. It also has a great flavour.

cons Hard to spread thinly so you often end up eating more.

TIP If you love the taste of butter but need to watch your cholesterol, save it for those times when you can really taste it, such as with freshly baked bread.

butter spreads

33% saturated fat

made from butter blended with canola oil, or butter that has had some of the harder saturated fat removed.

used in pastries, cakes, sandwiches and most recipes that call for butter, and for pan-fried steak, grilled chicken and fish.

pros Softer than regular butter, they spread easily straight from the fridge.

cons They're not recommended by the National Heart Foundation if you have high cholesterol.

TIP If you enjoy butter, this is a good compromise. Reduced-salt versions have 50% less salt and still taste good.

ghee

66% saturated fat

made from unsalted butter heated to separate and remove the milk solids.

used in traditional Indian cuisine, and for shallow-frying, roasting potatoes and pan-frying meat without burning.

pros It has a very high smoke point, so doesn't burn or smoke easily during pan-frying and deep-frying. It has a nutty flavour, contains vitamins A and D, and keeps for longer than butter.

cons It's very high in saturated fat.

TIP A little goes a long way – use it instead of other fats for flaky pastry.

cooking margarine

36% saturated fat

made from hydrogenated vegetable oil (see Trans Fats, page 110).

used in processed and takeaway foods, commercial pastries, biscuits and cakes.

pros Makes a light, flaky pie crust.

cons The hydrogenation process creates trans fats, which function similarly to saturated fats in raising blood cholesterol levels.

TIP The harder the margarine, the more trans fats it contains and the longer its shelf life. Butter or butter spread are better options.

copha

92% saturated fat

made from solidified coconut oil.

used in baking that requires a very hard fat, such as chocolate crackles, white christmas and no-bake slices.

pros Perfect for recipes that require you to melt, mix and set ingredients.

cons It contains the highest level of saturated fat you'll find in any fat.

TIP Save it for special-treat recipes that won't work with any other fat.

fats & figures

All oils and spreads, regardless of their type, are high in fat and kilojoules. If you're trying to lose weight, you need to limit the amount of total fat you eat. A tablespoon of any oil contains about 20g of fat and 735kJ. A tablespoon of a light spread gives you 16g of fat and 600kJ.

✿ monounsaturated

Oils, lean meats, chicken, eggs and fish contain mostly monounsaturated fats. They lower "bad" LDL cholesterol in the blood, but not as effectively as the polyunsaturates (see page 110). They're more stable and less likely to oxidise than polyunsaturates.

canola oil

8% saturated fat

made from the seeds of the canola plant, a variety of rapeseed.

used in margarines, salad dressings, oven-baked chips and the crumbs of processed fish fillets.

pros It's the lowest in saturated fat of all oils and a good source of heart-friendly omega-3 fats.

cons It has very little flavour and colour, and requires more processing than extra virgin olive oil.

TIP Use it as an economical base for frying or to make mayonnaise, adding a little olive oil for extra flavour.

olive oil

14% saturated fat

made from olives.

used in Mediterranean cuisines and salad dressings, for pan-frying and barbecuing, and to drizzle over cooked vegetables.

pros Olive oil is the key ingredient of the beneficial Mediterranean diet. Extra virgin olive oil has the richest antioxidant content of all oils and is one of the least processed. A little goes a long way due to its strong flavour.

cons It can be expensive.

TIP Keep the greenish extra virgin olive oils for salad dressings and drizzling over cooked vegetables. Use cheaper "pure" olive oil for cooking.



olive oil

peanut oil



peanut oil

canola oil



canola oil

olive oil spread

19% saturated fat

made from olive oil that's been blended with canola and/or lightly hardened vegetable fat.

used in recipes with margarine, (such as baking) and as a spread.

pros It has a pleasant taste and spreads easily, and is a good source of vitamins A and D.

cons There's not as much olive oil as you'd think – only around 20%. It contains 70% total fat, so limit it if you're trying to lose weight.

TIP If you want to use an olive oil spread for cooking, look for one with 50-59% fat. For baking recipes where you're replacing butter or margarine, a spread with a minimum of 60% fat is needed for the recipe to work. The exception is pastry, which is not really worth making without butter.

peanut oil

19% saturated fat

made from peanuts.

used in South-East Asian and Chinese cuisines in much the same way as olive oil is used in Mediterranean cuisines, as well as for deep-frying and stir-frying.

pros It's a deliciously fragrant oil which has a high smoke point, so it can withstand cooking at high temperatures without burning.

cons Presents a small potential risk for people with peanut allergies.

TIP Perfect for stir-fries, cooking in a wok and deep-frying.

● **Cold-pressed oils** taste great. However, they quickly oxidise, a process in which their flavour changes to make them less palatable. Store them in dark glass in the fridge.



✿ polyunsaturated

These fats are low in saturated fat, lower “bad” LDL cholesterol and so are recommended for people with high cholesterol. They are high in omega-6 fats and are a good source of vitamin E.

sunflower oil

11% saturated fat

made from sunflower seeds.

used in polyunsaturated margarines, salad dressings and stir-fries.

pros An all-purpose oil with a neutral flavour. It’s high in vitamin E.

cons It oxidises easily.

TIP Choose gourmet varieties of potato crisps, which are cooked in “high-oleic” sunflower oil, higher in monounsaturated fat than regular sunflower oil. Regular crisps are cooked in palm oil, high in saturated fat.

rice bran oil

20% saturated fat

made from the oil in the germ and outer hull of rice.

used in dressings, cakes, and for deep-frying and stir-frying.

pros It has little flavour, so it’s good for delicate dishes, has a high smoke point, and is a good source of vitamin E.

cons It’s too subtle for more robust Mediterranean-style dishes, so use it as a base for mayonnaise and dressings.

TIP It is an almost equal mix of monounsaturates (40%) and polyunsaturates (32%), and contains oryzanol, a natural chemical that can help lower the “bad” LDL cholesterol.

grapeseed oil

11% saturated fat

made from the seeds of grapes left over after winemaking.

used in salad dressings, mayonnaise, and for stir-frying and deep-frying.

pros One of the oils highest in polyunsaturated fat, it’s light and versatile with a high smoke point.

cons It can be expensive.

TIP Add a little olive oil or butter when frying for extra flavour.

sterol spreads (such as Logicol and Pro-activ)

11-17% saturated fat

made from vegetable oil with added plant sterols, natural compounds which are extracted from soy.

used in sandwiches as a spread, mashed potato, and over steamed vegetables.

trans fats

- Trans fats are another form of “bad” fat, created during the manufacture of commercial fats and shortening, when liquid vegetable oils are hydrogenated (hardened) to turn them into solid fats.

- Hydrogenated fats are useful for food manufacturers, as they can be made from cheap vegetable oils and increase the length of time products will last without refrigeration.

- You’ll find trans fats in:

- solid cooking margarines
- deep-fried fast foods
- potato crisps and corn chips
- meat pies and sausage rolls
- hazelnut chocolate spread
- shop-bought muffins, cakes, biscuits and doughnuts
- gravy powder
- crumbed or battered frozen chicken, fish fingers and spring rolls

- Trans fats can raise “bad” LDL and total blood cholesterol and lower “good” HDL

cholesterol, increasing the risk of heart disease. There is also early evidence that they may be linked to type 2 diabetes, liver problems and infertility.

- Almost all margarines in Australia and New Zealand are trans fat free, but they’re still used in baker’s shortening and deep-frying fats. Avoid products with hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated vegetable oil or fat on the pack.

pros The sterols block cholesterol absorption, forcing your body to “use up” more from its internal pool, lowering your blood cholesterol level.

cons You have to eat 2-3 teaspoons (25g) daily for the cholesterol-lowering effect to work. It may interfere with the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins so you need to eat lots of yellow and green vegetables to make up for it.

TIP They have about half the total fat of regular margarine. 🚫