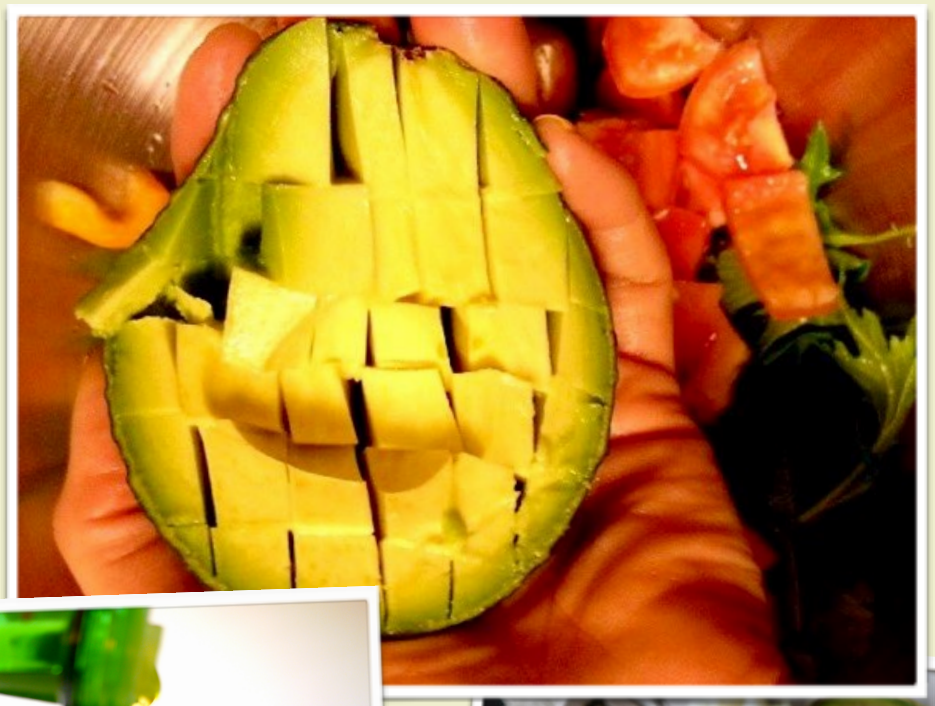
SMART FATS

A Pocket Guide to Healthy Fat Choices



Disclaimer

I am not a physician or a dietitian. The information presented in this manual is based on my own experience and is strictly educational. It is not meant to replace the advice and expertise of a medical professional.

The information contained in this manual may not be adequate for all individuals and is intended for healthy individuals 18 years and older only.

I am not responsible for any health conditions that may result from the opinions and suggestions presented in this manual.

Please get permission from your dietitian or a health care practitioner before making any changes into your diet. If you choose not to do so, you are responsible for the results.

In good health,

- Kersten Kimura

Introduction

Fats are essential to our well-being. So are the other two macronutrients–carbs and protein. All three exist for a reason, and we need them all for our bodies to function properly and to provide us with energy.

This pocket guide focuses on fats.

This pocket book will help you to…

- Learn from my mistakes, so that you never become fat-o-phobic. If you already are, I want you to recover from that and stop fearing fat and foods that contain fats.
- Realize that body fat (that is inside of your body, around your organs and under your skin) and dietary fat (fat you find in foods) are not same thing.
- Know that dietary fat won't automatically be converted into body fat. You shouldn't avoid dietary fat, even if you want to lose bodyweight.
- Learn the differences between unsaturated and saturated fats.
- Find out that even saturated fats are not bad!
- Realize that not all fats are the same in terms of their quality.
- Put right fats onto your table!

My Fat Story

There was a time in my past when I was so afraid of fats that I pretty much avoided them altogether. I started a crazy intense Weight Watchers period in 2007 and stayed on this fat-free track for several years. I was sure that if I ate fatty foods, I would gain body fat, and that was the last thing I wanted to happen.

In Weight Watchers, ***fat was evil***. Weight Watchers had a certain system where food was calculated into points. I clearly remember that we were allowed to eat two points worth of fat a day, which equaled with two teaspoons of olive oil or four teaspoons of low-calorie margarine or low-calorie or fat free cream cheese.

That's it. Two teaspoons of olive oil in a whole day! That's what I now use in my daily salad. And that's just one meal, I eat a few more meals a day.

Sure enough, I could've eaten more fat in Weight Watchers program, but then I would've been starving for the rest of the day, because after eating something fatty, there were not too many "points" left for other foods.

And because I didn't want to be starving, I chose low-point foods as unlimited pasta or unlimited oatmeal that filled me up. They had no fats in it. Making room for fats felt like a waste of "points".

I made sure that no drop of cream or no small piece of butter ended up in my food. When my mom or someone else would cook for me, I would stand right next to her making sure she doesn't put anything "forbidden" into my food.

Forbidden = Fat.

I was really careful and pretty much stayed as far as I could from fat for many years.

Did I lose weight? I sure did. I lost body fat, no doubt about that. But that was because my overall calorie intake was very low, especially considering how much I trained back then.

I was very skinny. But I wasn't healthy. I got problems like hormonal imbalance, I lost my period and I was brain foggy, irritable and tired all the time.

Today, I don't recommend anyone going on a fat free or very low fat diet.

Why Fats Matter

Fats, just like carbohydrates and protein, are crucial nutrients that our bodies need every day. Avoiding them may lead to the problems that I had, and potentially many other issues.

Here's why fat matters, in your body and in your food:

- Body fat is important for building cell membranes and making sure that our cells function properly.
- Fat helps to regulate and absorb nutrients in our body's cells.
- In our body, fat surrounds and protects our organs (kidneys, heart and liver) and help them to stay in place.
- Enough body fat is important for reproduction. Loss of period is a very common problem amongst women who like me, were (or still are) on a low-fat diet for extended period of time.
- Body fat helps to regulate body temperature.
- Fat is essential for skin and hair health.
- We need to eat fat for our hormones to work properly. That's especially important for women.
- Consuming dietary fat is crucial for proper brain functioning. My brain fog dissipated pretty quickly after I started eating more fat.
- Dietary fat is highly satiating, keeping you full for longer.
- Dietary fat slows down the digestion process, which, again, helps you stay full for longer time.
- Adding fat to foods makes food taste better!

Quality of Fats Matters Too

As you now know, it's important to add fats into your diet. But it's equally important to get your fat from right sources. There are fats that are great for your health, and fats that are better to avoid.

You can't eat any kind of fat you want and call it a healthy diet. You may heard of, or maybe know someone who's following one of those high fat diets, where the amount of fat is upped usually at the expense of carbohydrates. But many of

those diets simply tell you to ditch the carbs and eat fat, without paying any attention to the quality of it fats.

That's simply wrong.

There are good fats and not so good fats, just like there are good carbs and not so good carbs. It's short-sighted to say that you should prefer one macronutrient over the other just for the sake of doing that, without taking into consideration where the macronutrients are coming from.

What You Need to Know About Unsaturated and Saturated Fats

When talking about fats, you've probably heard words unsaturated and saturated.

What does it mean when fat is unsaturated? How is it different from saturated fat? In what foods you can found those types of fats? Should you or shouldn't you to use them and if, then for what purposes?

This section will answer all those questions.

Unsaturated Fats

Let's get the science part out of they way first and see what the term "unsaturated fat" means from chemistry perspective. Unsaturated fatty acids contain some carbon atoms that use double bonds to connect with one another. They're called unsaturated (=not completely saturated) because their carbon atoms can only bond with one hydrogen atom instead of two.

Okay, now as the obligatory chemistry part is out of the way, let's get to the practical use that you're really here for. What are the good and bad sources of unsaturated fats and how to use them in cooking?

Good unsaturated fats are olives, extra virgin olive oil (people refer to it as EVOO), nuts and seeds (almonds, brazil nuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, walnuts), nut butters, seed butters and avocados.

Eating those products help to lower blood cholesterol and prevent hardening of the arteries, the process known as artery clogging or atherosclerosis. You should have plenty of good unsaturated fats in your diet to avoid that.

Bad unsaturated fats are canola oil (also known as rapeseed oil), corn oil, vegetable oil, soybean oil, rapeseed oil and sunflower oil.

Yes, canola oil isn't healthy.

Canola and other so-called vegetable oils are made with lots of chemicals and therefore, should be avoided. Even though you may have heard that so-called vegetable oils, like canola oil, are good for you, that's not really the case. They are highly processed with toxins that you don't want into your body.

For example, let's take a look how canola oil, that many people consider as "health food", is made.

How Canola Oil is Made

To make canola oil, rapeseeds are heated on high temperature and processed with hexane. Hexane is a solvent that is used, for example, as an additive in various products including gasoline, glue, varnishes and inks and as special glue in roofing, shoemaking and leather products.

That's true: hexane that is used in all those products is also used in making canola oil and various other so-called vegetable oils.

Using hexane is more economical than mechanical pressing (for example, olive oils is made by pressing), because it allows to extract oils from materials that are not very high in them, like rapeseeds. Hexane enables producers to squeeze out as much as possible from the seeds, so only a little bit goes to waste.

But because some hexane ends up in oil too, it makes it grey, chunky and gives it a bad smell. No wonder, because hexane is also a byproduct from gasoline production.

To get rid of the grey color and chunky texture, the oil then needs to be further processed by bleaching and de-gumming. This is how canola oil gets its golden color–prior bleaching, it looks all but beautiful.

Once the color is fixed by bleaching, the bad smell is still there, and because you wouldn't want to use gross-smelling oil in your food, it needs to be deodorized. It's almost like spraying perfume on your body after a super sweaty workout…

Finally, the oil is ready to be bottled in plastic (which makes it all even worse) and taken to stores.

You can see the whole process in this video. I warn you, it's pretty darn gross.

You probably don't think anymore that canola oil is actually good for you. Remember that other vegetable oils, like soybean, corn, cotton and sunflower oil, are made the same way.

So, try to avoid vegetable oils. Know that when you're eating out, most foods, especially fried foods, are made with canola oil. Make better choices and order steamed, broiled or grilled foods instead.

How Olive Oil is Made

Olive oil, on the other hand, is made by mechanical pressing, without using solvents.

Back in the day, olives were crushed using stone or granite wheels. Nowadays, stainless rollers are used to grind olives into paste and then, some water will be added to the paste and stirred. The paste is put on mats and pressed to extract oil. Alternatively, oil can be extracted using centrifuge.

Check out this short video to see how olive oil is made.

Olive oil shouldn't be mixed up with a product called refined pomace olive oil. You should try to avoid the latter altogether. Making it is similar to that of canola oil. Some manufacturers use also the solid material that remains after pressing out oils and water from olive paste, and process it with either hexane or other solvents to create pomace oil. Read the labels and don't let the cheaper price get you!

Choose extra virgin olive oil every time, when possible.

Oxidization of Olive Oil

Heat, air, and light are the enemies of olive oil.

Olive oil is prone to oxidization. That means that it gets rancid quickly if you don't store it right, for example, forget it on your countertop where it's exposed to light. You can fasten up the oxidization process even more if you forget to put the lid on your oil bottle.

Storing Olive Oil

To protect oil from light exposure, it's sold in dark glass bottles. You can also pour yours into a stainless steel bottle to protect it from light. The best temperature for storing olive oil is about 14-15C (57-60F), but also room temperature, up to 21C (70F) is okay.

Olive oil is not like wine that goes better with time. So, don't wait for special occasion to use it! The fresher the olive oil, the better. Ideally, you want to use it within one year from when the olives were harvested.

Cooking with Healthy Unsaturated Oils

Good unsaturated oils, like extra virgin olive oil and sesame, macadamia, avocado and walnut oils, are prone for oxidisation, which means that they get bad quickly when exposed to light, air or heat. Heating those oils damages them and all the healthful properties of it will be lost. Use those oils cold.

What Should You Take Away from All This?

If you don't care about the chemical structure of fats, or if you want to delete from your memory the video of how vegetable oils are made (I don't blame you), that's fine.
All you need to remember are the types unsaturated fat sources that you should be putting into your food, and types that you should leave at the store.

Eat these unsaturated fats:

- olives
- extra virgin olive oil
- nuts and seeds (almonds, brazil nuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, walnuts)
- nut and seed butters
- avocados.

Avoid these unsaturated fats:

- canola oil (also known as rapeseed oil)
- corn oil
- vegetable oil

- soybean oil
- sunflower oil.

Saturated Fats

Another type of fats, saturated fats, have different chemical structure than unsaturated fats. Each carbon atom has two bonds that it uses to bond with hydrogen atoms, so that it becomes saturated with hydrogen. If you remember, unsaturated fats had just one bond that was used for bonding with hydrogen, hence the name unsaturated.

Now to the important stuff: What should you know about saturated fats? Which ones should you use and how to cook with them?

Good saturated fats

Good saturated fats come from two sources: plants and animals.

Most common plant based, good saturated fat sources are palm oil and coconut oil. Both are great for hot uses.

But there are also many animal based saturated fats that you should be eating. Those include butter, ghee, lard, tallow, lamb and duck fat, eggs, meat, seafood and full fat dairy.

Saturated Fat and Cholesterol

Wait, what?

Aren't all saturated fats bad and make your cholesterol levels peak?

That's what we've been told for decades: Saturated fats are bad for you, because they make your cholesterol levels go up, clog your arteries and give you heart attack. Avoid egg yolks and red meat!

15 years ago, a breakfast consisting of ground beef and whole eggs was thought to give you a heart attack. The new research shows though that there's no need to fear animal based fats.

But that's not really the case. As Chris Kresser, MS, LAc and functional medicine practitioner, points out: These conclusions were drawn from studies that were done more than half a century ago. More recent and higher quality evidence shows something different.

First of all, it's important to know that cholesterol isn't just bad thing that will cause you heart attack right this second when you're having some butter.

Not all cholesterol is bad for you. Yes, there is bad cholesterol, known as LDL. It contributes to formation of plaque which is a thick, hard deposit that can clog arteries and make them less flexible.

But there's also good cholesterol in our bodies, known as HDL cholesterol. HDL cholesterol helps to remove LDL cholesterol, which means that it also helps to avoid heart attack and stroke.

According to Kresser, there are no longer-term studies proving connection between saturated fat intake and rise in LDL cholesterol levels. It's now been shown that consuming saturated fat actually makes the level of good HDL cholesterol rise, decreasing the risk of heart disease.

Another reason not to fear fat originating from animal products is simply that our bodies actually absorb only small amount of cholesterol that we get from foods.

It's even been speculated that those horror stories about saturated fats rising bad cholesterol levels are pharmacy industry's way to sell more medicine to millions of people…

If that's true, this strategy has worked well.

What actually causes heart disease?

The dietary factors that actually cause the level of bad cholesterol (LDL) to rise and lead to heart attacks, are consuming highly processed foods that consist of a lot of man-made fats, sugar and other refined foods.

But it's not only diet that is making us sick.

Equally important reason why our bad cholesterol levels rise is simply wrong lifestyle. It would be easier to just throw out some food items from your diet and replace them with better ones, but stress, smoking and excess alcohol consumption are equally responsible for our health issues.

Those lifestyle factors take more time and effort to change. People are looking for shortcuts–because taking a pill is way easier than changing habits.

Eat Pasture-raised/Grass-fed Meats

Okay, I hope that you now believe that it's totally okay to eat saturated animal fats too.

There's one more thing though: Make sure that your animal based saturated fats are coming from pasture raised/grass-fed animals.

Fats of pasture raised/grass-fed animals are way healthier than fats of grain-fed animals. A label ***organic*** on the grain-fed meat package doesn't make it much healthier either. Meat and fat of grain-fed animals, just like dairy products made from milk of these animals, contains hormones, antibiotics and mycotoxins that cause obesity and other health issues. You don't want them in your body.

When using animal based saturated fats and dairy products, buy pasture raised/grass-fed and organic produce. It will not only be better for your health, but also for the environment and it also tastes so much better.

Avoid Man-Made Saturated Fats

The simplest way to think if you should or shouldn't have a particular saturated fat is to think if it exists in nature. If it does, go ahead. For example, coconuts and cows exist in nature, so coconut oil and grass-fed beef are safe. So is butter, if it's made of grass-fed cow's milk. Eat them.

But there are many types of saturated fats that don't exist in nature. Those are man made fats like margarines, shortenings and other butter-like spreads. Hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated fats, also known as trans fats, are made by adding hydrogen to them to make them hard on room temperature. Hydrogenated fats also spoil slower, so their shelf life is longer.

Consuming trans fats increase the level of bad cholesterol (LDL) and decrease the level of good cholesterol (HDL).

Here are some typical foods that contain trans fats:

Baked goods. Most store-bought cakes, cookies, pie crusts, crackers and other baked goods are made with shortening or margarine.

Snacks. Almost all potato, corn and tortilla chips contain trans fats.

Fried foods. Minimize your consumption if fried foods, as cooking oil used for making them contains highly processed trans fats.

Shortening and margarine. Those are made with partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, so avoid them and use real butter, coconut oil or palm oil instead.

Shortening, margarine and buttery spreads are often by-products of vegetable oil. Do you remember this grey mass that you saw in the video before? I'm pretty sure you don't want to eat it, but that's exactly what is used for making margarines, shortenings and other substitutions for butter.

Margarine, shortening and other hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils should be avoided.

Having said that, it's hard to ***never*** have them, especially when eating out. We can't control everything, and we all want to have a piece of cake once in a while.

But at least don't buy margarines or spreads to your home. Use real butter for baking and cooking. You may consume less calories when using those low or zero calorie butter substitutions, but instead of numbers, think what those calories are made of.

Better approach is to use full-fat, real fat products, and enjoy foods in moderation.

Storing Saturated Fats

As discussed before, olive oil has to be stored in a dark glass bottle and in a dark place. That's because olive oil (unsaturated fat) is not as stable as, for example, coconut oil (saturated fat). Because coconut oil is stable, it won't get rancid when exposed to light or if you accidentally forget it out on your counter without a lid on it.

Coconut oil is solid when stored in a fridge and softens at about 24C (75F). You can store it either way, depending on how you want it. You may have noticed how your coconut oil that is usually solid, gets runny when summer and warmer temps roll around.

Cooking with Saturated Fats

Healthful saturated fats are great for using on high temperatures, and there's no need to worry about oil getting damaged. Those oils are more stable than extra virgin olive oil and other unsaturated healthy oils that oxidize easily.

What Should You Take Away from All This?

Plant based saturated fats area great for baking and cooking. But don't be afraid to animal based fats either–they're not bad for you, if you choose pasture raised/grass-fed options.

Eat these saturated fats:

- palm oil
- coconut oil
- butter
- ghee
- lard
- tallow
- lamb fat
- duck fat
- pasture raised eggs
- grass-fed meats
- wild-caught seafood
- full fat dairy.

To stay happy and healthy, I highly recommend that you stay away from man-made saturated fats.

Avoid these saturated fats:

- margarines
- shortenings
- buttery spreads
- other hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils.

Conclusion

Fat is one of the three macronutrients that our bodies need every day to work properly. There is no reason to try to avoid fat in your diet–in fact, it's harmful.

Avoiding fats can cause heart disease, hormonal imbalances, brain fog, sleep deprivation, inability to focus, infertility, hair loss, skin dryness and other problems.

It's true that one gram of fat contains more calories than one gram of protein or one gram of carbohydrates. High energy content is the main reason why many people cut fats off from their menu when they want to shed body fat. They think that by avoiding fats, they consume less calories and as a result, can lose weight faster.

But fats are highly satiating, which means that we don't need to add huge amounts of it to get full, especially if we slow down when eating.

If you ditch the fat altogether, you actually may not end up consuming less calories. You simply eat more (usually carbs) to fill your body up, but that may lead to taking in more energy than you would have had you added a little bit of fat to your meal.

Not all fats should be treated the same, as there are huge differences in their quality. The rule of the thumb is to eat foods that exist in the nature. Therefore, coconuts, avocados and nuts are great sources of fats.

Think if a product you're about to eat was produced using natural methods. Olive oil is safe, because olives really grow in nature and as you now know what the oil making process looks like–the oil is pressed out from the fruit, you know the oil is good for you.

Meat and dairy from grass-fed animals are safe to eat: Those animals grew up eating grass in nature. The same is true for pasture raised eggs, because chicken who laid those eggs foraged for their natural diet.

Despite all the warnings about saturated fats being bad for us, you can eat animal-based products, if they come from a good source. Nature is always superior to anything man-made, and that includes also foods.

If the fat doesn't exist in nature, stay away from it. You now know that margarines and shortening can't be found in nature. Also remember that vegetable oils were made by using hexane, part of which also ends up in the oil.

It's not always possible to eat perfectly and choose the best ingredients for the food, especially when dining out. But you can always make better choices– choose steamed and broiled foods over deep fried ones.

Eat a healthy balance of naturally occurring or naturally produced fats to keep your health in check!