

Cutting down on saturated fat



**An easy to follow guide with tools and tips
to help you cut down on saturated fat, and
improve your health.**

What you eat can have a big effect on your health.

Did you know that eating too much fat could put your health at risk?

Most people eat far more saturated fat than they need. Eating too much saturated fat can raise your blood cholesterol. Having high cholesterol increases your risk of a heart attack or stroke. So, to help keep your heart healthy, you and your family should limit the amount of saturated fat that you eat.

This booklet will give you the information you need to understand why it is important to reduce the saturated fats in your diet, and includes tips, ideas and tools to help you cut down on fat.

You can go through this booklet by yourself, or with a healthcare professional such as your practice nurse.

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Background

Keeping my blood cholesterol within recommended levels is important for health.

Normal levels of blood cholesterol are important for health, but having high levels of cholesterol can block your arteries (the blood vessels carrying oxygen-rich blood around the body), which can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

There are two different types of cholesterol: high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, known as HDL or 'good' cholesterol; and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, known as LDL or 'bad' cholesterol.

NHS blood cholesterol recommendation for healthy adults:

Total cholesterol:
5 mmol/L or less

LDL: 3 mmol/L or less
HDL: 1 mmol/L or greater

One factor that has a big influence on your blood cholesterol is your diet, especially the amount and the quality of fat in the food you eat. We all need to eat adequate amounts of fat in our diet, but some fats are better than others. Saturated fats and trans fats raise your 'bad' LDL cholesterol.

So, to help reduce your cholesterol, you should cut down on foods high in saturated and trans fats.





It is important to know that no matter what your weight is you can still have high blood cholesterol levels.

Changing the types of food I eat can make a difference

It can be hard to know which type of fats are in our food. In the picture below you can see which foods are high in the different types of fat.

The goal is to replace saturated fats with unsaturated fats and avoid trans fats. Unsaturated fats are also called 'mono-' and 'polyunsaturated' fats.

It is important to remember that all types of fat are high in calories, which means that eating too much fat can lead to weight gain.

Type of fat	Found in	Characteristic
Monounsaturated 	Avocados, olives, olive oil, rapeseed (canola) oil, peanuts, almonds, cashew nuts, pistachios and spreads made from these nuts	Typically liquids at room temperature
Polyunsaturated 	Oily fish, like tuna, sardines and salmon. Sunflower seeds, sunflower oil, pine nuts, sesame seeds. Certain dark green leafy vegetables, like (spinach, kale broccoli).	
Saturated 	Animal fats, processed meats like sausages and burgers. Dairy products like whole milk, butter, cream, lard. Also, palm oil and coconut oil.	Typically solids at room temperature
Trans 	Baked foods like cakes, biscuits, pies and pastries. Fried foods and takeaways. Hard margarine (partially hydrogenated oil on the ingredient list).	



Saturated fat is found in:

- butter, palm oil, ghee, suet, lard and coconut oil
- cakes, biscuits and chocolate
- fatty cuts of meat, sausages and cured meats like salami
- all dairy products, especially sour cream, cream, crème fraîche and cheese
- pastries, like pies, quiches and pain au chocolate

UK health guidelines recommend that:



The average man aged 19-64 years should eat no more than **30g** of saturated fat a day



The average woman aged 19-64 years should eat no more than **20g** of saturated fat a day

A typical pizza margherita has 10.4g of saturated fats, which is a third of the maximum amount for men and more than half for women!



Cutting down on saturated fats can be achieved

You can cut down on the amount of saturated fat you eat by either choosing an alternative product with less saturated fat or by eating smaller portions of foods that are high in saturated fat.




Food labels

Compare food labels when shopping so you can pick foods lower in fat. Aim to choose products with green or amber for saturated fat.

	Low	Medium	High
Fat	3g or less	3 to 17.5g	More than 17.5g
Saturated fat	1.5g or less	1.5g to 5g	More than 5g

Dairy products

Choose lower-fat or reduced-fat dairy products.







Cut down on these dairy products		Whole milk, goat cheese, cheddar and other hard cheeses, butter, cream, brie, parmesan, processed cheeses like cheese strings or slices.
Choose these instead		Plain yoghurt, reduced fat cheeses, cottage cheese, plant-based spreads.
		Semi-skimmed milk (which contains just as much protein and calcium as whole milk), low fat natural yoghurt, reduced fat cottage cheese (plain), and quark.

Meat

Choose lean cuts of meat, trim visible fat and take the skin off meat and poultry before cooking.

Make your meat stews healthier by adding vegetables and beans.

How about having a meat free day?

Type of meat	Try to avoid	Try to choose
Pork	Cooked pork belly joint with fat 	Cooked lean pork leg joint 
Beef	Fried rump steak with fat 	Grilled lean rump steak 
Chicken	Fried chicken nuggets 	Grilled chicken breast without skin 



Butter, spreads, margarine and oil

Grill, bake, poach or steam food rather than frying or roasting. Instead of pouring oils straight from the bottle, use spray oil or measure out your oils with a teaspoon. Try reduced-fat spreads, such as those based on olive or sunflower oils.

Try to avoid



Coconut oil
87% saturated fat



Butter
54% saturated fat

Try to choose



Rapeseed oil
7% saturated fat



Olive oil spread
14% saturated fat

Desserts, cakes, biscuits, and confectionery

Cakes, biscuits, chocolate confectionery and chocolate spreads often contain lots of saturated fats as well as sugar, so try to keep them to a minimum.

Ice cream also contains cream as well as sugar, so try to find lower-fat versions or switch to frozen yoghurt or sorbet instead.

Try to avoid



Ice Cream
10% saturated fat



Flapjack
10% saturated fat

Try to choose



Sorbet or frozen yoghurt
0-2% saturated fat



Fruit bar
6% saturated fat



Practical tips to help you cut down on saturated fat



At home

Pizza: choose vegetarian pizzas, or lower-fat toppings, such as chicken, tuna and other seafood. Avoid extra cheese, pepperoni, or bacon.

Chips and potatoes: choose oven-baked chips where possible, or make your own in the oven with a little sunflower oil and skins on, rather than deep-frying. Roast potatoes in larger pieces with little oil. Mash potatoes with a small amount of reduced-fat spread and lower-fat milk.

Spaghetti bolognese and pasta sauces: use a lower-fat beef mince, turkey or plant-based (vegetarian) mince. Try using tomato-based sauces in place of cream or cheese-based sauces.

Fish pie: use reduced-fat spread and skimmed milk to reduce the fat in the mash and sauce.

Chilli: use lower-fat beef, turkey mince or plant-based mince in place of regular minced beef. Or, make vegetarian chilli using mixed beans, lentils and vegetables.

Chicken: choose leaner cuts (e.g. chicken breast) and take the skin off to reduce the saturated fat content.

Bacon: back bacon has less fat than streaky bacon. Try to grill it instead of frying.



At home, continued

Eggs: you can prepare eggs without any added fat, e.g. poached, boiled or dry-fried.

Milk: use semi-skimmed or skimmed milk on cereal or in hot drinks.

Cheese: a smaller amount of strong cheese (e.g. reduced-fat mature cheddar) can provide the same flavour than milder cheeses so you will use less. You will also use less by grating instead of slicing it.

Yoghurt: choose a lower-fat plain flavour, as well as lower-sugar where possible.



Eating out

Beverages: Where possible stick to plain coffee, tea or other low-calorie beverages. “Skinny” smaller servings of fancy coffees or milkshakes are preferable. Avoid adding cream or anything with extra calories on top.










Asian cuisine: choose dry or tomato-based dishes (e.g. tandoori or madras), instead of creamy curries (e.g. korma, pasanda or masala). Stir-fried or steamed Thai meals are preferable; choose those with lots of vegetables, or leaner meat or fish. Thai curries can contain a lot of coconut milk which is high in saturated fats. Choose steamed fish, chicken chop suey or Szechuan prawns in Chinese restaurants.

Kebabs: doner kebab has more fat than shish kebab, choose salad as a side without added sauces.



Swaps

It is the sum of all the small changes that make a big difference in cutting down on saturated fat.

-  Swap butter for lower-fat butter or vegetable oil spreads.
-  Swap red meat for fish, turkey or chicken without the skin.
-  Replace regular mince with leaner, reduced fat versions or plant-based mince.
-  Swap biscuits and chocolate that are high in saturated fat for biscuits with less saturated fat (check the label), or fresh fruit.
-  Switch from snacks high in calories to 100 calorie snacks like a malt loaf slice, fresh or tinned fruit or fruit salad, low-fat and lower-sugar yoghurt, chopped vegetables and lower-fat hummus, plain rice cakes or crackers with lower-fat cheese, one crumpet, one scotch pancake.
-  Switch from whole milk (blue label) to semi-skimmed (green label) or skimmed milk (red label).
-  Change sour cream and crème fraiche to yoghurt, full-fat greek yoghurt for low-fat yoghurt.
-  Change regular cheese to reduced-fat cheese.
-  Swap creamy or cheesy sauces for tomato- or vegetable-based sauces on your pasta, meat or fish dishes.



Health Action Plan

When you're starting to make any changes to your eating habits or activities in daily life, it's important to take the time to think about why you want to do this, set yourself a goal and monitor your progress.

Research shows that if you do this, you are more likely to stay focussed and on track to reach your goal.

The activities in this workbook are easy to complete, and designed to only take a few minutes.



Set a goal



Make an action plan



Check your progress



Follow up



1. Set a goal

Think about why you want to make these changes. It will help you to stick to your action plan if you first spend a bit of time thinking about your motives for making changes and then keep looking back at them over the next few weeks.

The best goals are “SMART” – Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed. Using this method can help you to set yourself achievable goals, which should give you the greatest chance of reaching your final goal.

- **SPECIFIC** - Setting out exactly what you want to achieve gives you a clear target to aim for throughout your journey.
- **MEASURABLE** - If there's a way for you to measure your journey e.g. weight, the distance you can walk or run, this is really helpful so you can keep track of your progress.
- **ACHIEVABLE** - Giving yourself smaller, achievable goals to aim for is the best way to reach your long-term goals
- **REALISTIC** - Being realistic about your goals and the resources that you have to complete them is important.
- **TIMED** – Think about when you can reasonably achieve this goal by; some changes will take longer than others for you to see the benefits,

Think about what you want to achieve, and write your goals down here.

How will you feel when you reach your goal?

Set a goal

	I want to...	Date started	How will I feel when I achieve this goal?	Date achieved
Example	Lower my cholesterol levels back into a healthy range (total cholesterol <5) by the time of my next blood test in 3 months. Or, Swap 5 of my regular every-day food items for lower-fat options by the end of this month.			
Goal 1				
Goal 2				
Goal 3				



2. Make an action plan

Use the next page to make your first action plan.

Action plans help you to decide exactly what you are going to do to reach your goal, and how and when you will do this. Thinking through and writing down an action plan to reach your goal makes it more likely you will do it!

Tip: if you're trying to make changes to your diet or lifestyle, try using the "three Rs" to set clear goals when making your action plan:

- **REPLACE** – try switching out unhealthy options for a healthier alternative (e.g. olive-oil spread in place of butter; or pick a healthier snack option like a portion of fruit or unsalted nuts instead of a bag of crisps or a biscuit), or add some exercise to your day by replacing taking the lift with using the stairs.
- **REDUCE** – think about which foods you could reduce your portion sizes of, or set a goal cut down how often you get a takeaway or buy unhealthy snacks.
- **REFRAIN** – are there any foods you now know are high in saturated fats, that you are planning to hold back from eating at all? Or how about actions – e.g. refraining from frying your vegetables at mealtimes and steaming them instead?

Start date	Goal	Action plan (what? How? When?)
Example	Swap 5 of my regular every-day food items for lower-fat options by the end of this month	<p><i>I will start by making 3 swaps from my every-day foods for lower-fat options this week.</i></p> <p><i>I will look at the food labels on my usual butter, milk and cheese when I go to the supermarket on Saturday, and pick lower-fat options instead using the traffic light labels to help.</i></p>
Week 1		
Week 2		
Week 3		
Week 4		



3. Check your progress

Taking 5 minutes each week to keep track of your progress can help to reinforce the changes you are making, and to recognise when you might need to ask for help or advice.

At the end of the week take the “5-minute challenge” and use this time to look back the goals in your action plan and think about what you have achieved.

Is there one area that you kept finding more difficult? What could you change to help you achieve your action plan next week? Use this to set yourself a new goal for next the week.

	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
Week 1	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>
What were the challenges of sticking to my action plan?			
What will I change for next week?			
Week 2	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>
What were the challenges of sticking to my action plan?			
What will I change for next week?			
Week 3	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><input type="checkbox"/></div>
What were the challenges of sticking to my action plan?			
What will I change for next week?			



4. Follow-up

Use this space to record your next check-up or appointment.

My next appointment is on:	With (GP / nurse / etc)
at / /	
at / /	
at / /	
at / /	

This booklet was developed based on research carried out at the University of Oxford’s Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, and was produced by the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Oxford and Thames Valley.



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