

# Cooking with Less Fat

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If you are concerned about reducing calorie intake to control your weight or reduce your risk of heart disease, there are several approaches for cooking with and eating less fat. Each one's eating pattern needs to be evaluated to determine what changes are appropriate.

- Consider the food itself. For example, meat is a source of fat in the diet. You could decide not to eat meat.
- Consider how the food is prepared. For example, frying meat increases the fat content. The method of cooking meat could be changed.
- Consider the serving size. For example, a 2 to 3 ounce portion of meat is considered a serving, but many prefer 6 to 8 ounces at a meal.
- Consider the frequency of eating the food. For example, some eat meat two or three times a day. Others may not eat it every day.

While you may want to reduce the amount of fat eaten, you need to be aware of the role of fat in food choices. Fat carries the flavor of food. Two examples: lean meat is not as flavorful as meat with fat marbling; also when baking, the recipe may say blend flavoring extracts into the shortening to be sure the flavor is blended into the product. Also fat in such foods as ice cream, custard, and milk gives a smooth pleasant feeling to most palates. Browning food in fat improves flavor and appearance. Also, fatty foods are slower to digest than other foods, so one feels satisfied longer after finishing meals that include some fat.

Most of the fat eaten is found in fresh and processed meat, milk and milk products, fats and oils, and baked desserts such as cookies and pies. However, besides fat,

meat and milk products are important sources of other nutrients such as protein, B vitamins, iron, zinc, and calcium. Keep this in mind in planning meals and give priority to using low-fat milk products and lean meat. Fats, oils, and baked products do not contain significant amounts of nutrients compared to the amount of fat or calories they contain, so you can decrease the amount of these foods without sacrificing nutrition.

## Menu planning

When planning meals keep in mind the importance of color, shape, and texture, as well as the flavor and temperature of food. Variety is important for good nutrition. It is helpful to have a positive and adventuresome attitude about trying new foods even if they don't become your favorites. Instead of never eating a food again, you might decide to eat it less frequently, or in smaller amounts.

To reduce the fat content of meals, evaluate the amount of fat that is in the food as well as the amount of fat added in food preparation.

Here are two breakfast menus. The first menu has twice as much fat as the second menu. What makes the difference?

Comparison of fat content of two menus

Menu I	Fat grams	Difference in grams	Fat grams	Menu II
½ cup orange juice	—		—	½ cup orange juice
2 scrambled eggs	16	10	6	1 poached egg
2 strips bacon	8	3	5	1 oz. broiled ham
2 slices toast	2		2	2 slices toast
2 teaspoons butter	8	4	4	1 teaspoon butter
1 cup whole milk	9	8	1	1 cup skim milk
	43	25	18	

First, consider the food choices. For example, the difference between two slices of bacon and 1 ounce of broiled ham is 3 grams of fat. The choice of skim milk instead of whole milk reduces the fat content by 8 grams.

Second, consider the methods used to prepare the food. The fat or milk added to eggs for scrambling makes a difference. Broiling the ham is important. Frying it would add more fat.

A third decision is serving size. Eating one egg instead of two obviously makes a difference, as does 1 or 2 teaspoons of butter. Eating twice as much lean ham would exceed the amount of fat in the two strips of bacon. What you eat is important, but how much you eat must be considered, too.

A fourth consideration is frequency: how often you eat the foods. If you prepare two eggs for breakfast only once a week and eat cereal the rest of the time, the total fat intake is less than if you ate one egg every day.

One more thing. Reducing the fat content of a meal also reduces the calorie content. This is helpful if you need to lose weight, but some people need to maintain weight or even gain weight and at the same time, keep fat

intake at a low level. What choices could be added to these menus? More orange juice or additional fruits would add calories as would jelly or jam used on the toast or with meats. A serving of cereal with low-fat milk would add calories, too. This may seem like a lot of food, in fact the volume of food needed increases, but it is the result of reducing the fat in meals and keeping the calories the same. This is when it may be helpful to plan to eat between meals in order to get the calories needed to maintain or gain weight.

Here are some other choices with a difference:

	Fat grams	Difference in grams	Fat grams	
"Super" Hamburger	32	22	10	Hamburger
French Fries	11	10.8	0.2	Plain potato
Broiled sirloin steak	27	14	13	Broiled round steak
Strawberry Pie	17	16	1	Strawberries
Fried chicken with breading	18	14	4	Broiled chicken

All these choices influence the total fat intake. Unless you are told by your doctor to eliminate a food from your meals, it may not be necessary. Remember to think of the choices of cooking methods, serving size, and how frequently you eat something.

### Main dishes — meat, poultry, fish and eggs

Meats are usually the meal's main dish or entree. When large amounts are eaten frequently, meat contributes over twenty percent of the fat in our diets. When buying red meat, select cuts from the round or chuck or cuts that have less marbling. The age of the animal as well as marbling influences meat tenderness, so cooking methods may need to change to ensure tenderness.

Braising or stewing are two moist-heat methods of cooking meat that help tenderize. Meat can also be tenderized by using tenderizers, marinades, or pounding the meat. The leaner but tougher cuts of meat may take longer to prepare but they can be very flavorful.

If you are roasting meat, be sure to use a meat thermometer. Overcooking removes tasty juices.

The drippings from meat can be defatted and used. Put the bowl or jar of drippings in the refrigerator (or freezer if you are in a hurry) and remove the fat which forms a solid layer. If you keep defatted drippings or stock in a jar, use them in soups or gravies. One tablespoon of cornstarch or 1½ to 2 tablespoons of flour to 1 cup of cold stock gives the basis of a low calorie gravy.

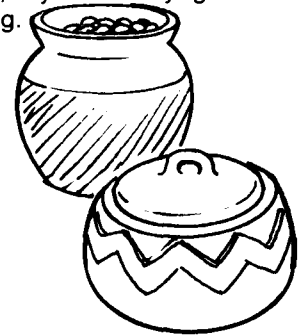
The fat in sausages and cold cuts cannot be trimmed away, so you may want to reduce the number of times you use them.

*Poultry*, especially the white meat with the skin removed, is lower in fat than red meats. The method of preparation is very important. Fried chicken with a layer of fat-soaked breading or crumbs is very high in fat. Broiling, baking, or stewing chicken are much better choices. Don't forget to defat the drippings or stock to use for gravy or soup. Canned chicken or turkey is expensive, but it is a convenient item to keep on hand for emergency salads or sandwiches. Leftover turkey can be frozen for future meals.

*Fish* is lower in fat than red meats, and like poultry you may want to eat it more frequently. Fresh fish, of course, is most flavorful. When preparing frozen fish, thaw just before use. Cook it quickly and don't overcook it. Fish is done when it flakes when lifted with a fork. Ten minutes in the broiler may be enough for many fillets.

Overcooking will result in a tough, dry, tasteless product. The seasoning or sauce for fish may be the key to increasing its acceptability. A cup of low-fat yogurt and 1 teaspoon of dill weed can be spooned over white fish after cooking. Place it under the broiler until the sauce bubbles, and then serve it promptly with a twist of lemon. You may prefer a tomato-based cocktail sauce with seafood instead of tartar sauce.

*Eggs*, are not high in fat, but the egg yolk is a concentrated source of cholesterol. Because eggs are nourishing, easy to prepare, and economical you probably don't want to eliminate them from your diet, except for a medical reason. However, you may want to consider reducing the number of eggs you eat or changing the way you cook them. For frying eggs, use a non-stick pan or reduce the amount of fat and use steam to finish them. If you are using eggs for sandwiches, try low-fat yogurt or a reduced calorie salad dressing.



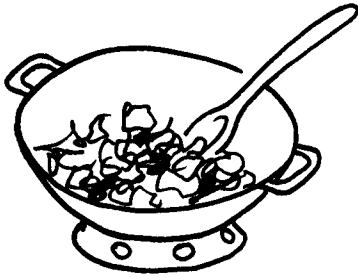
*Dried beans, peas, and legumes* are good sources of fiber, plant protein, zinc, and several B-vitamins (B-6 and folacin). Cook them with small amounts of meat and vegetables for seasoning casseroles, stews, and soups. Combinations of dried beans and rice or barley are very nourishing and economical low-fat main dishes.

Another excellent source of plant protein is tofu, a curd made from soybeans. It is a new food for many people, although it has been used in the Orient for centuries. It is very low in fat. Tofu has very little flavor, but it can be added to broth soups and casseroles, or scrambled with vegetables for an omelet-like dish. You will want to try a variety of seasonings, such as spices or soy sauce with tofu.

### Vegetables, pasta, and rice

Vegetables, pasta, and rice are low in fat unless you add butter to season or fry them. The potato is blotter-like in absorbing all kinds of fat, from gravy to sour cream. Most commercially frozen potatoes have fat added to them. Fresh potatoes, plain, are very low in fat. They can be baked, broiled, boiled, even mashed with low-fat milk in a small amount of cooking water.

Use fresh vegetables whenever available. You will want to store them promptly and properly to maintain their quality and natural sweetness. Their colors add a lot of eye appeal, especially when your meals no longer have foods that are browned by frying.



Instead of boiling vegetables, try baking, or use your pressure cooker, steaming, or try stir frying. To stir fry, put 1½ to 2 tablespoons of oil in a heavy skillet. Add a variety of vegetables that have been shredded or thinly sliced to the hot oil. Stir the vegetables, tossing them lightly until they are tender but crisp. You may want to put root vegetables in first, then add leafy vegetables nearer the serving time. Frequently this is how oriental vegetables are prepared, but any vegetables can be stir-fried.

Steaming vegetables takes 3 to 5 minutes longer than boiling them, but it retains the maximum amount of flavor, color, nutrients. Clean the vegetables and cut into uniform pieces or slices to insure uniform doneness. Put the vegetables in a colander or steaming basket over 1-2 inches of boiling water (just enough to reach the bottom of the basket). Cover tightly and cook until tender.

To flavor vegetables, pasta, and rice you may want to explore the world of *fresh herbs*. If you grow your own or buy them at a market, put them in your freezer in small labeled packets. One tablespoon of minced fresh herbs will replace ½ teaspoon of dried herbs in a recipe. Add herbs to the cooked vegetables about 5 minutes before serving. Long cooking diminishes the flavor. Remember that instead of butter, wine vinegar, lemon juice, and low-fat yogurt can all be used to add new flavors.



### Salads

Vegetable and fruit salads are low in fat until you add a salad dressing. Be careful, especially at salad bars in restaurants. If salad greens are dried after washing, the salad dressing will stick and you will need less of it.

When you use a salad dressing, consider preparing your own recipes. Use vinegar or lemon juice with water and small amounts of oil. Low-fat yogurt can be combined with seasonings to substitute for mayonnaise or salad dressing. Try a little honey in some plain yogurt over fruit. There are many low-calorie salad dressings on the market. Those made with corn, soybean, or safflower

oil are a source of polyunsaturated fatty acids which are thought to contribute to lower levels of cholesterol in the blood.

Salads that are marinated in oil, like three bean salad, or fruits combined with whipped cream or toppings are high in fat. Salads made with a flavored gelatin may be low in fat if no toppings, whipped cream, or salad dressing are added.

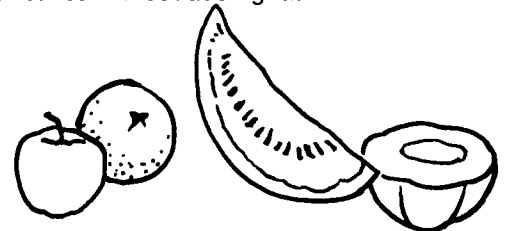
### Soups

Broth soups made from defatted stock can be hearty main dish items or a welcomed light meal. Prepare the stock ahead, and refrigerate it overnight so you can remove the layer of fat. Then add trimmed meat, vegetables, beans, rice, or noodles to make a tasty meal. Commercial broth and bouillon are low in fat but very high in salt.

### Breads

Breads come in a wide range of "richness." Avoid rolls or bread with a lot of eggs or butter. The flavored crackers and chips are high in fat, too. Commercial mixes and ready-to-eat products contribute about 8 percent of the fat in our daily diets.

Quick breads, made with vegetable oil, contain polyunsaturated fat and may be higher in fat than yeast bread. Check recipes and select ones with the least amount of fat. You can use two egg whites for one whole egg, eliminating the cholesterol in the egg yolk. Increase the baking powder by 1 teaspoon if you eliminate one egg. If you have a seasoned grill or a cured iron skillet, it will brown pancakes without adding fat.



### Desserts

Fruits, whether they are fresh, frozen, or canned, are probably one of the best low-fat dessert items if you are reducing fat intake. Low-fat fruit desserts can be as elegant as flaming peach melba, or as ordinary as a fresh apple. Fruit can be marinated in wine, made into fruit ices, baked in dried fruit compotes, molded in gelatin, or served over meringues or angel food cake. Low-fat yogurt on fruit is a good idea, too. Avoid chocolate, coconut, whipped cream, and toppings. Use ice cream and sherbet in moderation.

Make low-fat puddings with skim milk and cornstarch. If eggs are used, the number is divided by the number of servings, so you may be dividing two eggs among six people, lessening the cholesterol per person.

*Baked items* vary in fat content. Compare recipes and avoid the richer products. Use small servings and avoid eating them frequently. Baking with vegetable oil instead of butter or shortening will change the type of fat in the diet but not reduce the total fat significantly. If you make a substitution, use about ¾ cup of oil for a cup of solid fat. The quality of the product will be different because oil coats the flour particles instead of providing the layers of fat that give pastries their flakiness.



### Beverages

Skim, non-fat dry milk, and buttermilk are all low-fat milk products. Remember to use fruit juices and other beverages, such as cider and lemonade. Alcoholic beverages do not contain fat and may be used in cooking as well as beverages. The alcohol is vaporized in the cooking.

### Miscellaneous

Jellies and jams don't contain fat but are basically sugar. Use them in moderation. Consider them as a condiment with meat as well as a breakfast or snack item. Cranberry or mint jelly is used most commonly with poultry or lamb. Consider chutney, applesauce, or dried fruit to add flavor to roast beef or pork.



### Equipment

There is a variety of non-stick pans on the market. A well-seasoned iron skillet may be satisfactory because you don't have to be concerned about scratching the surface. Vegetable spray can be used to coat the skillet, broiler, and baking pans. Sprays help brown foods and prevent stuck-on-food while containing minimum amounts of fat.

When traveling, plan space for a portable cooler for fresh fruit, vegetables, and juices because they will be expensive purchased in restaurants. Remember that food always tastes better out-of-doors. Add interest to your meals by planning picnics, campouts, or backyard barbeques.

### Summary

There are many ways to reduce the amount of fat you eat. You may already have made some of these changes in your meals. Remember that *moderation* and *variety* are important for good nutrition, so don't eliminate nourishing foods from your meals unless your doctor tells you to do so. Small amounts of fat in meals contribute interesting flavors and needed nutrients. With these ideas you can review your food choices to decide if you can reduce unnecessary amounts of fats in your diet for more healthful and enjoyable eating.

### References

*Diet for a Happy Heart*, Jeanne Jones, 101 Productions, San Francisco, CA 94103, 1975, 192 pages. \$6.95. A collection of 200 recipes emphasizing low-saturated fat, low-cholesterol, and low-sugar food preparation.

*The Family Health Cookbook*, Alice White and the Society for Nutrition Education, David McKay Company, Inc., 2 Park Ave. New York, NY, 10016. 1980. \$12.95. These recipes require cooking skills, but the nutrition information provides guidance for implementing the dietary guidelines in family meals.

*The Fat and Sodium Control Cookbook*, Alma Payne and Dorothy Callahan, Little Brown and Company, Boston, 1975. This cookbook has been tested over twenty years. Many helpful ideas are offered for combining fat and salt modifications in food preparation.

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