The fat in the foods we eat gives us energy, helps cells grow, protects our organs, and keeps us warm. Unsaturated fats are healthy because they help to lower blood cholesterol levels, whereas saturated and trans fats are unhealthy because they raise cholesterol levels. All fats, whether healthy or unhealthy, are high in calories and should be eaten in moderation.

**Unsaturated Fat**

The unsaturated fatty acids help to lower blood cholesterol levels. They are found mostly in plant foods and are liquid at room temperature. They are listed on the food label as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Choose these types of fat instead of saturated or trans fat. Foods high in unsaturated fats are listed in the box below:

- Canola, peanut, olive, corn and vegetable oil
- Avocado
- Nuts
- Seeds (pumpkin, sesame, sunflower)
- Fish

**Saturated Fat**

Saturated fat is unhealthy because it raises blood cholesterol levels, which can increase the risk of heart disease.

**Trans Fat**

Trans fats do not exist in nature, but are man-made to be more shelf-stable and less likely to spoil. Trans fats are considered bad because they raise LDL “bad” blood cholesterol levels and decrease HDL “good” cholesterol levels.

Trans fat may be listed as “partially hydrogenated oils” in the ingredient list on a food label. It is important to read the food label because some foods labeled “trans fat-free” may actually have a small amount of trans fat (less than 0.5g per serving). Foods high in trans fat are listed in the box below:

- Fried fast food or foods fried at a restaurant
- Store-bought baked goods
- Some margarines

It is found naturally in many animal and dairy foods as well as palm and coconut oils. These fats are solid at room temperature. Foods high in saturated fat are listed in the box below:

**Saturated Fats**

- Fatty beef
- Pork, such as bacon
- The skin on poultry
- Animal fats, such as lard
- Whole-fat dairy such as butter, cream, and cheese
Dietary Cholesterol

We do not need to get any cholesterol from food because our bodies make all that we need. Limit the amount of cholesterol you eat each day to 300mg. It is found in animal foods such as poultry, meat, fish, dairy products, and eggs. It is not found naturally in any plant foods.

LDL Cholesterol

Low density lipoprotein, or LDL, cholesterol is considered the “bad” cholesterol because it carries cholesterol to various parts of the body. High levels of LDL cholesterol can cause plaque (fat deposits) to build up in arteries. This can make arteries narrow and cause poor blood flow which increases the risk of a heart attack or stroke.

HDL Cholesterol

High density lipoprotein, or HDL, cholesterol is considered the “good” cholesterol. It helps remove cholesterol from the blood and arteries so it can be removed from the body.

What should my cholesterol levels be?

Total cholesterol: less than 200 mg/dL
LDL cholesterol: less than 100 mg/dL
HDL cholesterol:
  - Men - greater than 40 mg/dL
  - Women - greater than 50 mg/dL
Triglycerides: less than 150 mg/dL

Heart Disease

Heart disease is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. The arteries leading to the heart become small and narrow, which decreases blood flow. This may result in a heart attack. There are some risk factors for heart disease that we cannot control such as family history, age, gender, and ethnicity. Heart disease risk factors we can change are: high blood pressure, high cholesterol, being overweight, smoking, and not getting enough exercise.

Eating for Heart Health

Changing the way we eat may also decrease the risk of heart disease. A heart healthy diet includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and heart-healthy, unsaturated fats. Replace unhealthy saturated and trans fats with healthy monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.

Regular physical activity is also important for heart health because it helps to lower LDL cholesterol levels and increase HDL levels.