



Obesity is mostly caused by an imbalance of calories-in (eating) vs. calories-out (activity). Fat provides a concentrated source of calories but a little fat won't cause obesity and it goes a long way to making nutritious foods taste great.

Fat and Trans Fat

What Schools Need to Know

CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS NEED SOME FAT

Fat is found in many healthy foods that provide nutrients to growing bones and bodies. Despite all the bad things we hear about fat, children and teens need it because:

- ✓ vitamins A, D, and E need fat to be absorbed
- ✓ cells need healthy fats to function well
- ✓ fat can add flavour and “mouth feel” to nutritious foods
- ✓ fat slows digestion of carbohydrates, helping them fuel children’s brains longer

HOW MUCH FAT CAN CHILDREN HAVE?

That depends on their ages. The Canadian Pediatric Society says nutritious foods should not be eliminated or restricted because of their fat content. Children should make a gradual transition from the high fat diet of infancy to the recommended adult level of 30% of calories from fat. Students’ bodies and brains are growing and need fat. In other words, lower fat foods become more important as students get closer to adulthood.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO ABOUT FAT IN FOODS?

Children and teens get more than one quarter of their fat from less nutritious foods like some bakery products, processed snacks, candies, chocolates and French fries.

Schools can minimize access to these unnecessary sources of fat by paying attention to what foods they sell to students. They can also encourage a holistic approach to healthy eating, rather than a fat-phobic approach. The Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools (2005, BC Ministry of Education) can help you make the right choices. They are designed to moderate, not eliminate, fat.

WHAT ARE TRANS FATS?

Trans fats are made when vegetable oils are processed into shortening or partially hydrogenated fats. Trans fats add texture to bakery items. They also tolerate higher temperatures without catching fire, so they’re popular in microwave popcorn and deep frying. Finally, trans fats add a “mouth-feel” that most consumers love. But they’re also linked to health problems.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS DECREASE TRANS FATS?

The Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools (2005, Ministry of Education) recommend limiting students’ access to trans fats. Many food companies have removed (or are about to remove) trans fats from their products and your vendors will be able to help you find these healthier alternatives. However, products low in trans fats aren’t necessarily healthy choices. Be sure to check for total fats, sodium, and sugars.



Are some fats better than others?

Yes. Some fats contain “omega-3 fatty acids” which tend to be good for us. Some fats contain “trans fats” which tend to be bad for us. You can learn more about fats from the table and websites shown on this page.

WHAT ABOUT DEEP-FRYING?

Deep-frying can add a lot of fat and trans fat. Fried foods served at school should meet the nutrition criteria in the Guidelines. If deep-frying, choose an oil that has low or zero grams of trans fat, avoid frying battered products, and keep portion sizes small. Set the price of fried foods high for maximum profit. This will discourage second helpings and help subsidize the cost of healthier choices.

Types of Fat	Major Food Sources*	Type of Choice
Omega-3 fats	Fattier fish (mackerel, herring, trout, salmon, swordfish, cod and bluefish), canola and soybean oil, flax seed, omega-3 eggs, walnuts, pecans, pine nuts	Good Choices
Omega-6 fats	Safflower, sunflower and corn oils, and non-hydrogenated margarines made with them; nuts and seeds	Good Choices
Monounsaturated Fats	Olive, canola, and peanut oils, and non-hydrogenated margarines made from them; nuts, seeds, and avocados	Good Choices
Saturated Fats with conjugated linoleic acid (CLA)	Milk products (whole, 2%, 1% milk, cheeses and yogurts)	Fair Choices
Saturated Fats	Fatty meats, eggs, butter, cream cheese, higher fat cheeses, lard, coconut, palm, and palm kernel oil; hydrogenated vegetable oil and fast foods, snack foods, and bakery items made with these	Poor Choices
Trans Fat	Shortening and partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, and any items made with these. For example: breaded or battered chicken/fish/vegetables, french fries, biscuits, scones, donuts, muffins, cookies, danishes, cakes, icing, fruit pie, pocket pizza, breakfast pastries, crackers, chips, crisps, cheesies, microwave and movie popcorn, instant flavoured coffee mixes, many margarines, chip dips	Worst Choices

Table adapted and modified from “Dietary Fat and Cholesterol”, www.heartandstroke.ca/healthyliving

*Check the ingredients and Nutrition Facts against the Ministry of Education Guidelines. Not all these suggestions may suit schools with allergy concerns.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ✓ Dietary fat and children: www.cps.ca/english/statements/N/n94-01.htm
- ✓ Health Canada’s Trans Fat Task Force: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/gras-trans-fats/index_e.html
- ✓ Teens and dieting: www.caringforkids.cps.ca/teenhealth/DietingInfo.htm
- ✓ Dial-a-Dietitian at 604.732.9191 (toll free in BC at 1.800.667.3438) www.dialadietitian.org