Fat Facts

Scientists have learned a lot about how diet affects our health, but there are still many questions left to answer. Hundreds of studies are being conducted around the world, each with its own set of questions. So, it's not surprising that we continue to see newspaper headlines that provide confusing statements about what to eat or what not to eat. For example, "Animal fat is bad, olive oil is good. Margarine is better than butter--then again, maybe it's not."

These headlines, especially the ones about fat, may have you wondering about your own fat intake and WHI. In this article, we will try to answer some of your questions.

- Is there a minimal amount of fat that I should be eating?
  No ideal level of dietary fat applies to everyone. In the WHI Dietary Change group, participants are asked to eat about 20% of their energy from fat. This percentage represents an amount that is well above minimal nutritional needs for fat.

- Should I aim for zero fat in my WHI low-fat eating pattern?
  No, your body needs some fat. Your choices of fat should be balanced between animal and plant foods.

- Have other low-fat studies been safely conducted with postmenopausal women?
  Yes, in a couple of studies, postmenopausal women have followed low-fat eating patterns. The Women's Health Trial Vanguard Study and the Women's Intervention Nutrition Study had participants who followed dietary programs that contained 15-20% of energy from fat. These studies show that average nutrient intake is adequate at this level of fat intake.

- How is the safety of the WHI Dietary Study monitored?
  An independent board appointed by the National Institutes of Health monitors study progress, outcomes (health events), and participant safety. This board (Data and Safety Monitoring Board) meets twice a year. It reviews study data and makes recommendations, when appropriate.

- Would dry skin and hair loss be caused by a low-fat eating pattern?
  No, not likely. To date, only hospitalized patients receiving liquid diets for long periods of time (more than six months) have reported these symptoms. Symptoms like dry skin are often the result of other factors (e.g., changes in the environment, such as weather, air conditioning, and heating). Changes in detergents, bath products, and cosmetics can also cause dryness to occur. Even new medications, a lack of water intake, and stress can create similar results. In addition, dry skin and hair loss are

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Building Skills and Friendships

Group 123, a Dietary Change group from the Minneapolis Clinical Center, knows the power of peer support. This 11-member group has been meeting since 1995, and they’re still going strong. Many of the participants come from the surrounding communities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, but one member commutes from 150 miles away, while another drives 50 miles to attend meetings.

Their group nutritionist, Janice Cox, enjoys this group: “They clicked nicely from the start. They’re a friendly group and greatly enjoy each other’s company.” She adds, “They rely on each other for support and as sources of information.”

Group member Jean Noren agrees with her nutritionist: “I’m not a ‘group’ person, but in this case, we have a wonderful nutritionist and group. It’s interesting to meet women from different walks of life.”

Jean especially enjoys the food samples at the group meetings. “It’s very valuable,” she says. “There’s a general attitude that if it’s low-fat, it’s not going to be good. It’s really helpful to taste new things.”

The group has a good attendance record at their classes. They also meet between maintenance sessions, often going to restaurants to practice their “eating out” skills while catching up on each other’s lives. One of the members, Sally Helsman, used to be hesitant to ask a lot of questions when dining out. “Now,” she says, “I have no problem asking the waiter about what’s in a serving.”

On average, the group members meet their fat gram, grain, and fruit/vegetable goals. Still, many of the group members concede that they struggle with getting enough grains. Jean Noren attests: “This is the most difficult part of the diet ‘change’ for me. It takes a real effort to consume six servings a day.” She adds, “It seems to result in a certain amount of intestinal turmoil.” Jean’s peers and nutritionist have helped her with this. “Because we underestimated serving sizes,” she said, “we were eating more grains than we thought we were. Beano™ has helped, too.” Another group member, Delcome Hollins, finds it hard to meet her grain goal, too, though she keeps trying.

Despite the hard work of making dietary changes, Group 123 remains committed to WHI and see the positive effects on their lives. Member Sally Helsman says, “I feel better about myself.” Another member, Marilyn Domeier, found she had more energy when she reduced her fat intake. Jean Noren concludes, “It’s a really good program. I’m glad I’m in it.”

Hats off to all the members of Group 123 for their hard work and support of one another!

Some members of Group 123 at a peer group meeting in a Minneapolis restaurant (From left to right: Sally Helsman, Marcia Chinnock, Marlene Hinshaw, Jean Noren, Marilyn Domeier, Helen Vagle)
Light and Refreshing Salad Dinner
(Fat = 9 grams)

Smoked Turkey and Fruit Salad
Whole Wheat Roll or Pocket Bread (no fat)
Frozen Sorbet
Beverage

Smoked Turkey and Fruit Salad

Note: It’s best to make this salad the day before to let the flavors blend, or let it chill for several hours before serving.

1 cup diced smoked or roast turkey breast
1/4 cup nonfat plain yogurt
1/2 cup celery, diced
2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
2 tablespoons slivered almonds (optional)
1 cup red or green seedless grapes
2 tablespoons prepared mustard
pepper to taste
1/4 teaspoon tarragon (optional)

Place the almonds (if using) in a microwave-safe custard cup or small bowl. Microwave on HIGH for 1 minute; stir, then cook for another minute on high (Or, preheat oven to 350°. Spread the almonds in a small baking pan and bake them for 5 minutes, or until lightly browned.) Set the almonds aside.

In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together the yogurt, mustard, tarragon (if using), and pepper. Add the turkey, celery, grapes and parsley; toss well. Sprinkle with almonds. Cover the salad and chill for several hours to blend the flavors.

Makes: 2 servings
Fat: 7 grams per serving
Recipe from Healthy Cooking for Two (Or Just You) by Frances Price
Summer Cookout
(Fat = 3 grams)

Grilled Firecracker Chicken
Grilled Vegetable Kabobs
Sliced Watermelon and Beverage

Grilled Firecracker Chicken

4 (4 ounces, uncooked), skinned, boned chicken breast halves
1/3 cup tomato sauce
2 tablespoons lemon juice
dash of salt
nonstick vegetable cooking spray
1/4 cup apple jelly (regular or sugar-free)
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
6 slices canned jalapeno peppers
fresh jalapeno pepper slices (optional)

1. Combine tomato sauce, apple jelly, lemon juice, garlic powder, salt and canned jalapeno peppers in an electric blender or food processor and blend until smooth.

2. Place chicken in a heavy-duty, zip-top plastic bag. Add 1/4 cup tomato mixture, reserving remaining sauce. Seal bag and shake until the chicken is well coated. Marinate in the refrigerator at least 15 minutes.

3. Remove chicken from marinade (discard marinade in the zip-top bag). Coat grill rack with nonstick cooking spray, and place on the grill over medium-hot coals (350° to 400°). Place the chicken on the rack; grill, covered, for 5 minutes on each side or until done. Serve with reserved tomato sauce mixture. Garnish with fresh jalapeno pepper slices, if desired.

Makes: 4 servings
Fat: 3 grams per serving
Recipe from Cooking Light the Lazy Gourmet

Grilled Vegetable Kabobs

2 teaspoons taco seasoning mix
1/2 cup fat-free Italian dressing
4 medium new potatoes, cut in half (1 to 1-1/2 inches in diameter)
1 bell pepper, cut in eighths
1 medium zucchini, cut in eighths
2 ears of corn, each broken or cut in fourths

Heat grill. Mix taco seasoning and dressing. Thread remaining ingredients, alternating vegetables, on four 10-inch skewers, leaving space between pieces. Brush dressing mixture over vegetables. Cover and grill kabobs over medium coals 4 inches from heat for 25-30 minutes, turning frequently and brushed with dressing until the vegetables are tender. Note: If you use bamboo or wooden skewers, soak them in water for 30 minutes before using to prevent burning. These flavorful vegetables work equally well under the broiler, too.

Makes: 4 servings
Fat: 0 grams
Recipe adapted from Betty Crocker’s New Choices for Two
What's as crunchy as potato chips, but without the fat? New fat-free and low-fat Orville Redenbacher's 100% Popcorn Cakes. They're available in regular and mini sizes (about the size of a rice cake or cookie, respectively). These great-tasting snacks come in flavors like Barbecue, Nacho, White Cheddar Cheese, Butter, Caramel, and Peanut Butter Crunch. Eight mini cakes contain zero to one gram of fat, and two full-size cakes have one gram of fat (two full-size or eight mini = one grain serving). Air-popped popcorn also makes a quick snack; if you don't enjoy it plain, spray the popcorn lightly with non-stick vegetable cooking spray and sprinkle with salt or butter-flavored granules.

Cooking for one or two can be hard when so many recipes make four or more servings. Extra portions sometimes make it difficult to stop at a single serving or leave you eating the same entree for days. Here's a cookbook that will help solve these problems: Healthy Cooking For Two (Or Just You). An easy-to-read table in each recipe lists the amount of ingredients you'll need for one to two servings, or two to four servings. Many of the recipes call for six ingredients or less and offer time-saving tips like using your grocery store's salad bar for stir-fry vegetables. You won't want to miss tempting recipes like Tamale Pie Topped with Spoonbread, Big Easy Salad of Red Beans & Rice, or Peach Dumplings (Frances Price, Rodale Press, $27.95).

If you like toaster waffles as a quick, hot breakfast, but have stayed away from them due to their fat content, Kellogg's has the answer: Eggo Homestyle Low Fat Waffles or Special K Waffles. Two Eggo waffles have only 2.5 grams of fat and the Special K waffles are fat-free. They make a perfect partner for wonderful summer berries. Top the waffles with fruit and you'll never miss the butter; you'll be on your way to your daily fruit and grain goals with your first meal of the day (one waffle = one grain serving)! Tip: If you have a favorite low-fat pancake or waffle recipe, make extra and freeze them in a closed container between sheets of waxed paper. They'll reheat well in the toaster or microwave.

The information provided in this section is not an endorsement by WHI of specific food products.

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Food for Thought

Not excited about eating that mushy leftover fruit salad? Throw a cup or two into a blender and add some non-fat yogurt and fruit juice for a refreshing fruit smoothie. Overripe bananas can also be used this way; peel and freeze them, then combine with frozen strawberries and orange juice in the blender for a treat. Create your own favorite combination! Adding ice or some frozen fruit helps thicken your drink.

Use tea to reduce oil in a basic vinaigrette for salads. Equal amounts of vinegar, oil, and--believe it or not--strong-brewed tea produce a mellow vinaigrette that is neither bland nor overly acidic.

It can be hard to melt fat-free cheese. To avoid a chewy texture on microwaved foods, sprinkle fat-free cheese on dishes after microwaving, allowing the heat from the cooked food to melt the cheese. Also, for a softer, moister melt when broiling, spray the surface of fat-free cheese lightly with non-stick cooking spray or water beforehand.

Variety is the spice of life, so the next time a new or exotic fruit or vegetable catches your eye in the produce aisle, be adventurous and ask one of the produce employees about it. Find out about its flavor, how to tell if it's ripe, how to store it, and how it's cooked or served. Who knows? You might even get a free sample!
LEARNING ABOUT FAT

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more likely to occur as a woman ages and goes through menopause.

If you have questions about your low-fat food choices, talk with your nutritionist. Also, plan to attend the upcoming Winter group session. This session will give you an opportunity to look at the variety and balance in your own eating pattern.

I like to save my fat grams for red meat, desserts, and baked goods; is this a problem?

Yes, this can be a problem. It's important to eat a mixture of animal and plant foods because each of these foods provide different types of fat. Saturated fats are mostly found in animal foods. Unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated) are mostly found in plant foods and some seafood.

Unsaturated fat provides some important nutrients that are not available in saturated fat. So, if most of your fat grams are saved for foods that contain saturated fat (e.g., red meat, high-fat baked goods, etc.), you may be missing foods that contain unsaturated fats (e.g., beans, whole grains, vegetable oils, nuts/seeds, etc.).

Consider rotating some of your higher-fat choices, such as meat and baked goods, with fish, beans, and vegetable oils. The amounts you use do not have to be large, nor do they need to be eaten every day. The point is to get a healthy balance in your food choices.

Here are some tips that will help provide a healthy balance in your low-fat eating pattern:

- Eat plenty of beans, green leafy vegetables, and whole grains.
- Try to eat fish at least once a week.
- Sometimes garnish salads with a tablespoon of sunflower seeds or toasted walnuts.
- Use small amounts of vegetable oil (canola, olive, safflower, sunflower, or corn) to sauté vegetables or other foods once in a while.
- Occasionally use low-fat salad dressings and low-fat mayonnaise instead of fat-free.