

# The 411 on unsaturated fats

July 30 2019, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—Doctors may be as confused about what dietary advice to pass on to their patients as the patients themselves—even when it comes to protecting against heart disease through diet, according to U.S.,

British and Italian reports.

Part of the problem is the continuing lack of nutrition education offered in medical schools. Another is the lack of time doctors have to spend with patients. But one piece of information that is getting through is to eat less [saturated fat](#) and more unsaturated fat—a better replacement strategy than eating "low-fat" packaged foods that are actually very high in refined carbohydrates, such as sugar.

But which unsaturated fats should you choose from?

First, know that there are two main types: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Most foods high in unsaturated fats contain both, though some have more of one than the other. For instance, avocados, nuts and olive and canola oils are higher in monounsaturated fats.

You may be familiar with polyunsaturated fats containing the omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). You may have also heard about research disproving the heart-health effects of omega-3 *supplements*. However, the body still needs omega-3s for [good health](#), and getting them directly from food, not capsules, is important. EPA and DHA are found primarily in fatty fish, so aim to eat 8 ounces of seafood a week, with choices like salmon, mackerel, sardines, anchovies and herring. You can also get the [omega-3](#) alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) from some plant-based foods, primarily walnuts, [sunflower seeds](#) and oil, sesame and pumpkin seeds, and chia and flax seeds. The body doesn't use ALA as easily as it does EPA and DHA, but it's still valuable.

Less well-known are the omega-6 [fatty acids](#). They, too, are in many nuts and seeds, but also in corn and soybean oils, heavily used in packaged foods like chips. Getting too many omega-6s can be a problem, especially if they outweigh the omega-3s in your diet, another reason to

limit processed foods.

**More information:** The Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University has more on [essential fatty acids](#).

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