

## 12 good health

## On the fat track

Continued from P 11

Fats should form 20-30 per cent of one's daily calorie intake. If you want to quantify that in everyday terms, it means you can include four teaspoons of visible fat (oil, butter, cheese, etc) in your daily diet, says consultant dietician Jyoti Lalwani.

"This quantity is for an adult leading a sedentary lifestyle who's already at his/her ideal weight. For a growing child, the quantity will be higher," she adds.

And as far as your required fat intake is concerned, eating a variety of different fats is far healthier than sticking to just one type of oil for the rest of your life.

So what types of fats are there? How good or bad is each? And how to avail the benefits of all?

## Types of fats

**Saturated fat:** This is the most traditional source of fat and is largely animal-based. It includes the fat found in meats, butter, cheese and cream and coconut oil. Many food products contain these fats. Baked and confectionery products are the well-known examples. Guidelines tell us that saturated fats should account for not more than 11 per cent of our daily fat intake.

"The reason we need to be so careful is because saturated fats convert easily to bad cholesterol in our body," says Lalwani. It is seen as

a bad fat because too much of it will contribute to hardening and narrowing of the arteries.

## Unsaturated fats

There are two main kinds of unsaturated fats — monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. The former come mainly from the oleic acid found in most nuts like groundnut and sesame; avocados and olive oils.

Monounsaturated fat is believed to lower cholesterol and may assist in reducing heart disease. Like polyunsaturated fat, it provides essential fatty acids for healthy skin and the development of body cells.

Polyunsaturated fats are the essential fatty acids that contain the richest sources of Omega-3 and Omega-6, mainly found in fish oil, sunflower and corn oils and products made from these oils.

Polyunsaturates can help reduce the "bad" cholesterol caused in the body by saturated fat. "However, it's unhealthy to stick to just one of these good fats, just because they help lower bad cholesterol. Using just safflower oil for your cooking all the time isn't going to have too many benefits for the heart either," says Lalwani.

## Trans fatty acids

A by-product of hydrogenated vegetable oil, trans fatty acids (TFAs) are technically monounsaturates,

but have been proven to be dangerous to health. Denmark was the first country to cut them out completely, saying there was "no such thing as a safe limit". Switzerland and Austria have since followed, several American cities have made their restaurant food trans fat-free and Britain is considering banning them completely too.

"Trans fats don't just lower your "good" cholesterol level; they raise the "bad" cholesterol faster than any other fat. Usually all hydrogenated vegetable fats like *vanaspati ghee*, contain trans fat," says Lalwani.

The most important research about trans fat began in the US in 1976 and ran for 13 years. It found that a 2 per cent increase in trans fat calories would bring a 23 per cent increased risk of heart disease.

So, in terms of heart health, consuming 25 g of trans fats is equivalent to eating an entire 227 g block of butter (saturated fat). Scary?

What this more damaging in India is that we have a sea of unreg-

ulated, unlabelled products that are sold in our markets, so there's no way of knowing whether the food you're buying contains trans fats or not. "But even with unlabelled baked products like *khari* biscuits, know that if it's made with *vanaspati ghee*, it will contain trans fats," adds Lalwani.

## Steer clear of trans fat

Look out for hydrogenated veg-



htcafé

PHOTOS: MCT



You don't have to totally omit saturated fats like butter from the diet

etable oil or fat on the ingredients lists of familiar brand names. You will still find it in cakes and confectionery, ready to bake cake mixes and, most commonly, any deep-fried restaurant or street food.

## Healthy way to eat fats

The Indian Dietetic Association recommends that you eat monounsaturated fats, polyunsaturated fats and saturated fats in a ratio of 1-1.5-1 to get the most from these fats. "Different oils have different benefits so it's healthier to use a variety of oils in your cooking," says Lalwani.

"Good" fats don't contain fewer calories than bad fats. An excess use of any oil is bad. "You can't drizzle on the olive oil on your salad just because it's good for your heart. It's extra calories after all," she adds.

So our ancestors, it seems, had a point: stick to natural sources and just watch quantities. And spare the butter. There really is nothing wrong with it as long as you spread it on in moderation.

With inputs from Guardian News Service