

## KEEPING HEART HEALTHY



People with diabetes are much more likely to suffer from heart disease than those without diabetes. Eating a diet high in saturated fat, and having high blood glucose and high blood pressure, may contribute to heart disease. It can also contribute to other vascular problems associated with diabetes, such as stroke, bad circulation to the legs and feet, and male impotence.

People with diabetes should keep their blood glucose and blood pressure in good control and choose “heart healthy” foods everyday. Heart healthy eating refers to choosing foods that are low in fat and sodium, and high in fiber. In terms of fat, it is important to focus on limiting cholesterol and solid fats.

All animals, including humans, make cholesterol. Some people’s bodies make too much of it. Cholesterol is also found in fatty animal products, such as eggs, some meats, and high-fat dairy products (like many cheeses).

Solid fats refers to fats that are solid at room temperature. One type of solid fats, *saturated fats*, is found in fatty animal products and some vegetable oils, such as coconut and palm oils, which are often used in processed foods.

Liquid vegetable oils can also be converted into solid fats by means of hydrogenation, which produces *trans-fatty acids* (or *trans fat*, for short). These substances can be as harmful to the body as saturated fat. For this reason, trans fat is now required to appear on Nutrition Facts labels by 2006.

Products with high amounts of trans fat include solid vegetable shortening and regular margarines. Trans fat is also commonly used in crackers, cookies, snack foods and baked goods.

All fats and oils are high in fat and calories, so it

is important to eat them in moderation. It is also important to look for ways to substitute healthier oils for ones that contain high amounts of cholesterol, saturated fatty acids and trans fat. Lard, bacon fat and butter add flavor to foods, but are high in cholesterol and saturated fat. These fats should be used only occasionally in small amounts.

In contrast, there are liquid oils that should be your “fats of choice,” because they are good sources of monounsaturated fats, which are heart healthy. These include olive oil, canola oil, and peanut oil. In most recipes, these oils can replace solid fats, such as lard or butter. Oils with strong flavors (such as olive, sesame and walnut) add flavor to foods even when used in small amounts. Most nuts contain high amounts of monounsaturated fats, including almonds, walnuts and pecans.

It is also important to choose solid vegetable fats carefully. Even though vegetable shortening does not contain cholesterol, it does have high amounts of saturated and trans fats, and therefore should be used only once in a while. Margarine, developed as a substitute for butter, is manufactured in many different forms. *Regular margarine* melts well, and works well for frying. It can also be used successfully in baked goods, and it is popular as a spread. However, because it is high in saturated fat and trans fat, it should not be eaten in large quantities. *Reduced-fat margarine* is healthier, and it works well as a spread and in many baked goods. It is not suitable for frying because it contains water and can cause spattering and burns. *Fat-free margarine* is used primarily as a spread. It doesn’t melt well, meaning it is not appropriate for frying or sautéing.