

# High-Fat Diet



## What It Means for Your Heart

**Y**ou may know about the dangers of cholesterol—how it builds up in the coronary arteries, causing blockages that can lead to heart attacks. To help control this, you may limit your intake of cholesterol found in all animal products, especially in organ meats, eggs and dairy products. But did you know that too much dietary fat is just as harmful as too much cholesterol? Here's why.

### The Fat-Cholesterol Link

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that builds up on the inner wall of an artery and hardens into a substance called plaque. If that plaque gets too thick, it can obstruct blood flowing through the heart's coronary arteries and cause a heart attack. Diets high in saturated fats tend to raise the concentration of cholesterol in the blood. In addition, these fats themselves circulate in the blood and are deposited in the walls of blood vessels along with cholesterol. Saturated fats include most fats that are solid at room temperature—such as animal fats, butter, margarine, palm oil, coconut oil and hydrogenated vegetable oils.

### More Fat—More Clotting Danger

When there's a great deal of plaque present in the blood vessels, pieces of plaque sometimes break away from the artery wall. The body's blood-clotting system attempts to repair the breach by forming a clot. For some reason, high fat levels in the blood increase the activity of certain blood-clotting factors. As a result, the clotting system may overreact, producing a monster clot that's likely to block the already narrowed coronary artery and cause a heart attack.

### The Weight Connection

Since fat is a very high-calorie food—nine calories to each gram of fat, compared with four calories to a gram of starch or protein—a high-fat diet often leads to excess weight gain. Obesity increases your chances of developing such conditions as high blood pressure and diabetes, in addition to placing greater strain on your heart. Obesity also makes it more difficult to stay active and keep your heart healthy with regular exercise.

### What You Can Do

You can see that fat in any form is hard on your heart, and saturated fats give your heart a double whammy. That's why the American Heart Association recommends that you reduce your total fat intake to no more than 30 percent of your daily calories and limit saturated fat to no more than one-third of your total fat calories. Ask your doctor or the American Heart Association for details on a low-fat, heart-healthy diet.