

# Nutrivore90: Focus on Healthy Fats

## Why the Right Fats in the Right Amounts Matter for Lifelong Health

Fats have gotten a lot of mixed messages over the years—but the truth is, **fats are essential**. Your body needs fat to build hormones, support brain and nerve function, absorb fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K), and keep every single cell in your body functioning properly.



Still, we need to be mindful of **how much** and **what kind** of fat we're eating.

🙄 **Too little fat**—and particularly, not enough of the right fats—can increase the risk of issues like depression, anxiety, nutrient deficiencies, obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, and certain autoimmune disease.

🤖 **But too much fat**—especially from highly processed or added sources—is also linked to a higher risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, dementia, certain cancers and certain autoimmune diseases.

So what's the sweet spot? It's not about eating a low-fat or high-fat diet—it's about eating a **balanced amount of fat from nutrient-rich sources**. That means aiming for 20% to 35% of our calories coming from from fat, mostly healthy fats like oleic acid (found in olive oil, avocados, and some nuts and seeds), linoleic acid (found in nuts, seeds and soybeans), and omega-3s fats (found in some nuts and seeds, and all seafood), while keeping saturated fat especially from processed sources in check.

You don't need to avoid fat—you just need to **focus on the right ones**.

Incorporating more healthy fats into your meals isn't about tracking grams or cutting out foods—it's about **building flexible, nutrient-rich habits that feel good and stick**. Just like every other part of the Nutrivore90, this focus is about what you can add to your plate to support long-term health in a sustainable way.

# The Healthiest Fats

**Not all fats are created equal.** Some are essential for life and offer powerful protection against chronic disease—these are the fats we want to focus on the most. Three of the most beneficial types of fat are oleic acid, omega-3 fatty acids (especially EPA and DHA), and linoleic acid. Here's why they matter—and how to get enough of them.

## Oleic Acid

**Oleic acid is a monounsaturated fat** that plays a major role in reducing cardiovascular disease risk. It helps lower LDL cholesterol and triglycerides, raises HDL cholesterol, reduces blood pressure, and improves insulin sensitivity. It also reduces markers of inflammation and oxidative stress.

A large body of research links higher oleic acid intake to lower all-cause mortality, improved heart health, and better metabolic health. Substituting saturated fat with oleic acid-rich fats is more effective for improving cholesterol and heart health markers than simply reducing total fat intake.

✓ **Aim for:** 10% to 20% of your total calories from monounsaturated fats (oleic acid accounts for the majority of monounsaturated fat in foods).

### Top Sources of Oleic Acid:

- Olive oil
- Whole olives
- Avocados
- Avocado oil
- Canola oil
- Macadamia nuts and cashews
- High-oleic sunflower oil
- Palm olein

## EPA & DHA (Omega-3s from Seafood)


EPA and DHA are long-chain omega-3 fats found in seafood. They are essential for brain, cardiovascular, immune, and eye health. These fats reduce inflammation, improve memory and cognition, support neurotransmitter function, enhance blood flow to the brain, and even promote the formation of new neurons.

Low intake of EPA and DHA is associated with increased risk of Alzheimer's disease, mood disorders, cardiovascular disease, and other chronic illnesses. Eating more seafood is consistently linked with longer life expectancy and reduced risk of cognitive decline.

✓ **Aim for:** At least 250–500 mg daily (this is part of the rationale behind aiming for three or more 4-ounce servings of seafood per week).

### Top Sources of EPA and DHA:

- Salmon
- Sardines
- Mackerel
- Herring
- Anchovies
- Oysters
- Mussels
- Crab
- Squid

 **Note:** All fish and shellfish is a good source of omega-3 fats, so if you prefer leaner options like tilapia, cod or shrimp, that's a great choice too!

## ALA (Omega-3s from Plants)

ALA is a short-chain omega-3 fat found in many plant foods. While it supports heart and immune health and contributes to omega-3 balance, only a small portion is converted to EPA and DHA in the body. That means ALA is helpful, but not a replacement for seafood-derived omega-3s.

✓ **Aim for:** A serving or more daily of ALA-rich plant foods.

### Top Sources of ALA:

- Walnuts
- Chia seeds
- Flaxseeds and flaxseed oil
- Hemp seeds
- Edamame
- Canola oil

## Linoleic Acid (Omega-6 Fat)

Linoleic acid is an essential omega-6 polyunsaturated fat. Despite fear-mongering online, linoleic acid plays a vital role in supporting skin and membrane integrity, hormone signaling, and balanced inflammatory responses.


Contrary to online myths, linoleic acid has been shown in high-quality human studies to reduce cardiovascular disease risk and lower all-cause mortality. Getting enough linoleic acid—especially from whole food and minimally processed sources—supports heart, brain, and immune health.

✓ **Aim for:** 5% to 10% of your total calories from omega-6 fats.

 **Top Sources of Linoleic Acid:**

- Sunflower seeds and sunflower oil
- Pumpkin seeds
- Sesame seeds and tahini
- Soybeans and soybean oil
- Walnuts
- Corn oil
- Safflower oil

Including all four of these healthy fats throughout the week ensures you're fueling your body with the nutrients it needs for resilience, energy, and long-term health.

 **Tip:** *If you're looking for a handy-dandy tool for tracking your servings of healthy fats, you'll be excited to know that the Nutrivore Weekly Serving Matrix includes checkboxes for seafood; nuts and seeds; and olives, avocados, and their oils!*

## Busting the Vegetable Oil Myth

You may have heard that vegetable oils are inflammatory or harmful to health—but **human studies tell a very different story.**

The idea that vegetable oils cause inflammation comes from outdated animal studies and a misunderstanding of omega-6 fats. Linoleic acid, the primary fat in most vegetable oils, is actually an essential fatty acid that plays a key role in supporting skin health, cellular structure, and normal immune function.



**High-quality research has shown that:**

📍 Higher linoleic acid intake is associated with lower risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and all-cause mortality.

📊 Tissue levels of linoleic acid (a better marker than food recall) correlate with lower inflammation, not higher.

🌻 Substituting butter or lard with vegetable oils like soybean, sunflower, corn, and especially canola oil is linked with lower death rates from chronic disease.

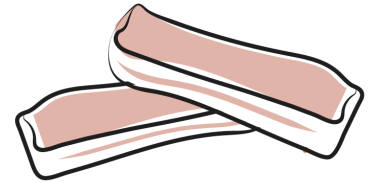
Even though olive oil is a standout for heart health (largely due to its polyphenols and oleic acid content), **vegetable oils still play a supportive role in a healthy diet**—especially when they help you cook and eat more veggies or whole grains!

Among vegetable oils, canola oil stands out for its impressive health benefits: **it's rich in both oleic acid and ALA**, and numerous studies show that canola oil is just as effective as olive oil at improving cholesterol levels and reducing cardiovascular disease risk. It's also one of the most affordable and widely available healthy oils—making it a practical and beneficial choice for everyday cooking.

**Vegetable oils aren't harmful—they're helpful**, especially when used in place of saturated fats or ultra-processed ingredients.

## What About Saturated Fat?








Saturated fat has been at the center of nutritional controversy for decades. Some studies have found no strong link between saturated fat intake and risk of cardiovascular disease, while others show that replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats, especially from whole food sources, can reduce cardiovascular risk. *So what gives?*






One key insight: **the context matters.** Saturated fats from ultra-processed foods and refined fats used in high-heat cooking tend to increase risk, while whole food sources—like cheese, dark chocolate, and unprocessed red meat—may have neutral or even slightly beneficial effects when part of a balanced diet. In addition, the science is mixed on whether saturated fats from plant foods, like coconut oil, should be moderated as well. Overall, more studies are needed to fully understand the health impact of saturated fats.

While the jury is still out on saturated fats, it's prudent to **aim to keep saturated fat below 10% of total calories**, especially from processed foods and cooking fats.

**Whole food sources of saturated fat** (enjoy in moderation):

-  Cheese
-  Yogurt
-  Sour cream
-  Dark chocolate
-  Unprocessed red meat
-  Eggs
-  Coconut and coconut products

**⚠️ Minimize saturated fats from ultra-processed or refined sources,** such as:

-  Sausage, bacon, and processed meats
-  Butter, ghee, tallow, and lard (especially for high-heat cooking)
-  Packaged baked goods and snack foods

**You don't need to fear saturated fat**—but it's smart to be mindful of your sources and overall balance. Following Nutrivore principles (balanced macros, a variety of whole foods, and plenty of healthy fats) naturally keeps saturated fat intake in a healthful range without requiring strict rules.

## Why More Isn't Always Better

While healthy fats are essential, **it's possible to get too much of a good thing**. While many people benefit from *increasing* fat intake (especially if they've been avoiding it), others may already be eating well above what's needed. **If you're coming to Nutrivore90 from a low-carb or high-fat background, it's worth checking in with your overall fat intake—especially if your plate is heavy on oils, nuts, and fatty cuts of meat.**

The **Acceptable Macronutrient Distribution Range (AMDR)** for fat is **20–35% of total calories**, and research shows that staying within this range is best for long-term health because it helps support hormone health, brain function, energy, and nutrient absorption. Diets that exceed this—especially those high in saturated or added fats—can crowd out other nutrient-dense foods, reduce dietary diversity, and make it harder to meet fiber and micronutrient goals.

Here are some tips to help balance your fat intake:

### **Cook with fats, but don't let them take over the plate.**

Stick to 1–2 tablespoons of oil per meal, depending on your cooking method.

### **Choose whole food fats when possible.**

Avocados, nuts, seeds, and fatty fish offer more than just fat—they also contain fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals.

### **Use fats to enhance—not dominate—meals.**

Think: a drizzle, a sprinkle, or a spread, rather than a foundation.

### **Check in with your overall plate balance.**

Pair healthy fats with protein foods, vegetables, and starchy whole foods like legumes and whole grains to support a balanced, nutrient-diverse meal.

## Tune into satiety.

If you feel sluggish or overly full after a high-fat meal, try reducing the portion size and increasing your veggies next time.

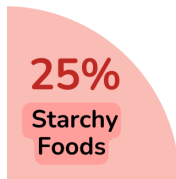
**Nutrivore is all about balance—not restriction.** This section is here to help you reflect and fine-tune if you're already on the high-fat end of the spectrum. **You don't need to eat less—you may just need to eat a *little differently* to feel your best.** And if you're unsure whether your fat intake is right for your health needs, talk to your doctor or a qualified nutrition professional for personalized guidance.

## How Fats Fit in the Nutrivore Meal Map

Fats don't have a dedicated section of your plate because they can be incorporated into every section! This flexibility makes it easier to meet your fat needs throughout the day without having to measure or track exact portions. It's about making balanced, flavorful meals with built-in nutrient support. Here are some ways to incorporate healthy fats into meals.



**In the fruit and vegetable half of your plate,** you might roast vegetables in olive or vegetable oil, drizzle salad dressing on your salad or steamed veggies, make coleslaw, or add avocado, olives, nuts or seeds to your salads and veggie dishes.




**In the starchy quarter of your plate,** you might roast root veggies in olive or vegetable oil, serve a baked potato with sour cream, add a tahini dressing to your roasted chickpeas, make a lentil salad with lemon juice and olive oil, or enjoy a pasta alfredo or pesto.












**In the protein quarter of your plate,** you might choose fish or shellfish as your protein food, serve steak or chicken with chimichurri, or fry up some tofu in canola oil.

And, there's still room for other fats like butter or bacon when flavor demands it, or as part of your 20% quality-of-life foods.

 **Note:** It's also important not to overdo fat, so at each meal, pick and choose one or two sections of the plate where adding a healthy fat will make the most difference in terms of eating enjoyment. It's okay to have a meal here and there where healthy fats are incorporated in all three sections of your plate; but for many people, that would exceed the AMDR for fat if all of your meals are composed that way.

## Budget Tips for Eating More Healthy Fats

You don't have to splurge to get enough good fats. These budget-friendly strategies can help you meet your needs without stretching your grocery bill.

 <b>Buy store-brand oils.</b>	 <b>Use nuts and seeds as toppers, not snacks.</b>	 <b>Stock up when it's on sale.</b>
<p>Skip the fancy bottles. Store-brand or budget olive and vegetable oils offer great nutrition at a lower cost. Even refined olive oil (not just EVOO!) contains plenty of oleic acid.</p>	<p>Nuts and seeds can be pricey when eaten by the handful. Instead, sprinkle them on salads, yogurt, oats, or grain bowls for a nutrient boost in smaller (more affordable) portions.</p>	<p>Olive oil, vegetable oil, nut butters, seeds, and canned fish all keep well—especially when stored in a cool, dark place to prevent oxidation and preserve freshness. Grab extra when they're discounted and store them for future weeks.</p>
 <b>Choose value seafood.</b>	 <b>Buy in bulk.</b>	 <b>Double-duty legumes.</b>
<p>Canned salmon, sardines, mackerel, herring, and even tuna are rich in omega-3s and often far more affordable than fresh fillets.</p>	<p>Shopping at stores with bulk bins or wholesale items (like sunflower seeds or oils in large containers) can reduce the cost per serving.</p>	<p>Not only do legumes provide fiber and protein—they also contribute healthy fats like ALA and linoleic acid. Stretch your meals by adding beans or lentils to soups, salads, and grain bowls.</p>
 <b>Try nut and seed butters.</b>	 <b>Cook with blended oils.</b>	 <b>Use fats to cook nutrient-dense foods.</b>
<p>Sunflower seed butter, peanut butter, and tahini are concentrated sources of healthy fats that go a long way per serving.</p>	<p>High-oleic blends (like canola-olive or sunflower-soybean) are often cheaper than pure oils but still offer heart-healthy fats.</p>	<p>Adding fat to veggies, whole grains, or legumes not only boosts flavor and satiety—it also improves absorption of fat-soluble vitamins.</p>

Eating more healthy fats doesn't have to be expensive—it just requires a few smart swaps and a little planning!

## Fats at a Glance

Here's a quick summary of the healthiest fats to include in your meals:

### **Oleic Acid (Monounsaturated Fat)**

Heart, brain, and metabolic health

**Olive oil, avocado, canola oil, macadamias, cashews**  
Aim for 10–20% of calories

### **EPA & DHA (Omega-3s from Seafood)**

Cognitive support, inflammation balance, heart protection

**Salmon, sardines, mackerel, oysters, algal oil**  
Aim for 250–500mg daily (3 servings fish/week)

### **ALA (Omega-3s from Plants)**

Complements EPA & DHA, supports overall health

**Flax, chia, walnuts, hemp seeds, edamame, canola oil**  
Include a serving or more per day

### **Linoleic Acid (Omega-6 Fat)**

Skin health, hormone signaling, inflammation regulation

**Sunflower seeds, tahini, soybeans, corn/safflower oil**  
Aim for 5–10% of calories

When you prioritize these fats from a variety of whole and minimally processed foods, you support long-term health—and keep your meals satisfying and flavorful! Following Nutrivore principles (balanced macros, a variety of whole foods, and plenty of healthy fats) naturally keeps saturated fat intake in a healthful range without requiring strict rules.