

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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How Much Cholesterol in Saturated Fats?

Recently the question came up of how much cholesterol is there in saturated fats, and does chicken fat, lard, butter and beef suet all have the same amount of cholesterol? I think the question was meant to give someone a reason to eat butter on their toast and the skin on a barbequed chicken! But the answer was not what they expected to hear. Why? Because saturated fat and cholesterol are different things.

Not all foods with a lot of saturated fat have cholesterol, and some foods with lots of cholesterol might not have much or any saturated fats. Cholesterol likes to travel with saturated fat, but although it travels with any kind of fat it is really not fat. And there is cholesterol in every kind of meat, chicken or fish and almost every kind of food that came from an animal. Even butter and milk have some cholesterol.

Cholesterol is a necessary part of the wall of all animal cells. We have cholesterol in every cell, from our brains to our toe bones and all the muscles in between. Cholesterol is the starting point for our bodies to make many of our hormones, especially the sex hormones. But, there is not more cholesterol in a fat cell than in a muscle cell. So a lean piece of beef or a chicken breast probably has more cholesterol than a chunk of butter or a piece of beef suet of the same size. Liver and eggs have lots of cholesterol, but very little saturated fat.

Now don't go thinking, like the person who asked the question, that this means you can eat all the butter or chicken fat you want. The trickster here is our liver. Most of the cholesterol in our blood doesn't come from the cholesterol on our plate. Our liver

uses the saturated fat we eat to make cholesterol. In most of us, the more saturated fat we eat, the more cholesterol our livers make.

On the other hand, cholesterol is only made by animals, never by plants. Some vegetable oils showing up a lot more now in cookies, crackers and cereals are coconut and palm kernel oil. These are very saturated. They stay almost solid at room temperature and don't go rancid. And there's not a drop of cholesterol in them. But that doesn't mean we can eat as much of them as we want. They still have a lot of calories, and they can still be turned into body fat and cholesterol.

So, while the amount of saturated fat in a food does not determine how much cholesterol is there, it does have a big effect on how much cholesterol ends up in our blood. There's no direct percentage, because each of us is different. But in general, if you eat a lot of saturated fat you are more likely to have high cholesterol.

If you are concerned about your cholesterol levels, the line to read on a food label is the Saturated Fat line. Don't worry too much about the %, just look at the number of grams. For every 100 calories in the food (that's about the third line on the label), you want to get no more than 1 g of saturated fat. For example, if a food has 320 calories in a serving, there should not be more than 3.2 g of saturated fat.

Finally, it's up to you to decide which you want more, butter on your toast or greasy fried chicken skin. A tablespoon of butter has 7.2 g of saturated fat and 30 mg of cholesterol. The difference between half a chicken breast roasted with or without skin is 4.5 g more of saturated fat and an extra 9 mg of cholesterol in the meat with skin. Either one will probably raise your cholesterol levels, so why not stick to a lean chicken breast without the skin, some soft margarine, and fewer visits to the doctor's office?

Here's a tasty, healthy chicken dish for dinner tonight. Use reduced fat cheese for even less saturated fat. Serve with salad and warm corn tortillas.

Mexican Oven-Fried Chicken

1 cup low sodium tomato juice cocktail	¼ tsp hot red pepper sauce
2 ½ pounds chicken pieces, skin removed	2 oz sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded
1 ½ cups crushed corn flakes	4 tsp taco or chili seasoning mix

Mix tomato juice and hot sauce in shallow dish. Add chicken, turn to coat. Cover, marinate at room temperature for 30 minutes, or refrigerated for 3 hours, turning frequently. Drain off marinade and discard. Heat oven to 375°F. Mix all other ingredients in large, sealable plastic bag. Add chicken, one or two pieces at a time to bag. Seal and shake until chicken is coated. Spray baking sheet with nonstick spray. Arrange chicken on sheet in single layer. Press any remaining seasoning mixture onto chicken. Bake 1 hour or until cooked and center of thick pieces is 165°F, and chicken is crisp. Serves 8.