

# 8 Easy Ways to Replace Saturated Fats with Unsaturated Fats



By Wendy Bazilian, DrPH, RD

Fats are good. They are an important part of your daily diet and play an essential role in human health from head (brain!) to toe (joints!), and every cell in between. Fats also help us feel full and ensure healthy communication between nerve impulses and the transfer of nutrients through the bloodstream. It's a balancing act, and some types of fat work more in favor of our health than others.

Research has also shown that swapping out saturated fats (animal fats like butter, cream and fat on meats) with unsaturated fats, especially polyunsaturated fats, has a positive impact on heart health<sup>1,2</sup>. In fact, the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend reducing saturated fat intake and in particular, shifting food choices from those high in saturated fats to those high in polyunsaturated fats<sup>3</sup>.

Unsaturated fats are found in foods such as walnuts, seeds, plant oils, avocados, and fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, herring, and sardines. In just a one-ounce handful, walnuts provide polyunsaturated fat (13g), offering an excellent source of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), the plant-based form of omega-3 fatty acids (2.5g). Science continues to uncover the benefits of ALA.

## Here are a few easy ways to help make some smart swaps for saturated fat!

- Substitute a blend of chopped walnuts and mushrooms, beans or cauliflower for some/all of the meat in your own favorite recipes. Try the veggie and bean-rich Brilliant Chili topped with Walnuts recipe\* for a hearty new mealtime staple.
- When baking, replace 1/3 to 1/2 the butter with high-quality vegetable oils or other more nutritious and lower-calorie options like plain fat-free Greek yogurt, applesauce, pumpkin, mashed prunes or fruit compotes. You can use this strategy in homemade recipes and with boxed mixes, too.
- In recipes that call for butter, try using olive oil in its place or use a mix of butter and olive oil and you'll cut the saturated fat in half.
- Try spreading avocado instead of cream cheese on whole grain bagels and toast. Puréed avocado also works well for a replacement in creamy sauces. Try the Eggs Benedict with Avocado "Hollandaise" recipe\* for a lighter take on this classic breakfast favorite.
- At snack time, choose a homemade trail mix (like walnuts, dried cherries and a few dark chocolate chunks) or veggies and hummus instead of packaged crackers or cookies. You'll reduce the saturated fats and boost the nutrition (and be more satisfied, too!)

- Watch your portion size with red meat and try swapping one meal each week with fish or beans. For burger night, try blackened salmon fillets instead of ground beef patties.
- Instead of cheese and croutons on your salad, add nuts. You'll get the same satisfying effect that will help boost your energy without as much saturated fat. The unsaturated fats, protein and fiber will help you stay satisfied and energized all afternoon. Try a mixed greens salad with garbanzo beans, tomatoes, apple slices and chopped walnuts. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar for that added yum-factor!

- Instead of eating the skin of the chicken, try my Easy "Oven-fried" Walnut Crusted Chicken. It removes the saturated fat in the skin but retains the moisture and flavor of the meat. Add a cup of roasted veggies and ½ cup wild rice, and you have a healthful, delicious meal.



## Easy "Oven-Fried" Walnut Crusted Chicken

Courtesy of Wendy Bazilian, DrPH, RD

### Serves: 4

Four 6 oz. bone-in chicken breasts, skins removed  
 1 cup low-fat buttermilk  
 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard  
 3-4 cloves minced garlic  
 1/2 cup finely chopped California walnuts  
 1/4 cup panko breadcrumbs  
 1/4 cup yellow cornmeal  
 1/8 cup millet  
 2 teaspoons paprika (or smoked paprika)  
 3/4 teaspoon cayenne (optional)  
 1 teaspoon dried thyme leaves  
 1 teaspoon dried oregano leaves  
 1/2 teaspoon coarse-cracked black pepper  
 1/2-3/4 teaspoon sea salt (or less to taste)  
 Lemon wedges

### Directions:

- In a bowl or glass measuring cup, whisk buttermilk, Dijon and garlic. Place chicken in a large bowl or resealable zip-top bag and pour the buttermilk mixture over it. Toss to coat, cover or seal well and refrigerate 2 to 24 hours, turning every so often. (This is a good recipe to start the prep the night before or in the morning to finish by coating and baking for dinner that night.)
- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Mix the panko breadcrumbs, walnuts, cornmeal, millet, spices and herbs in a bowl or large resealable zip-top bag.
- Add each piece of chicken one at a time and shake in the bag (or toss in the bowl) until well covered. Discard the buttermilk marinade.
- On a baking pan sprayed with oil, or lined with a silpat or parchment paper, bake for 45-60 minutes until golden brown and internal temperature is 165-170 degrees.
- Serve with lemon wedges, a vegetable side or salad and a whole grain like quinoa or brown rice (optional).

**Nutrition Information (1 chicken breast):** Calories: 387, Total fat 15g, Saturated fat 2g, Monounsaturated fat 2.6g, Polyunsaturated fat 8g, Omega-3 1.3g, Trans fat 0g, Sodium 578mg, Cholesterol 125mg, Total carbohydrate 19g, Sugars 2g, Dietary fiber 3g, Protein 44 g

<sup>1</sup>Farvid MS, Ding M, Pan A, Hu FB, et al. Dietary Linoleic Acid and Risk of Coronary Heart Disease: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Cohort Studies. *Circulation*. 2014;130(18):1568-1578.

<sup>2</sup>Li Y, Hruby A, Bernstein AM, Hu FB, et al. Saturated fat as compared to unsaturated fats and sources of carbohydrates in relation to risk of coronary heart disease: A prospective cohort study. *J Am Coll Cardiol*. 2015;66(14):1538-1548. doi: 10.1016/j.jacc.2015.07.055.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015 - 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. December 2015. Available at <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>

\*Recipe available on [walnuts.org](http://walnuts.org)



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