



Fat

Fat performs several vital physiological functions. The fat incorporated into such organs and tissues as mammary glands, nerves, brain, and lungs and the fat in adipose tissue that cushions and supports vital organs is known as *essential fat*. **Storage fat** is considered *non-essential*, although it has the important function of storing energy-rich molecules.

Obesity

Obesity refers to excess body fat, and is usually defined as being 20% or more overweight. About 30% of Australians fall into this category.

Obesity alone may not pose a risk of premature death, but the frequency of several serious health problems does increase with excess weight. *Obesity increases the risk* of hypertension, type II diabetes mellitus, and hyperlipidemia, all of which increase a person's risk of heart disease and stroke. Gallstones, gall bladder disease, cirrhosis of the liver, kidney disease, and some cancers are more common in obese individuals. In addition, extra fat results in increased stress on the weight-bearing joints, with higher rates of osteoarthritis, back pain, and other orthopaedic complications.

For most sedentary people, a weight gain means an increase in body fat. It is also possible to get fatter over the years and see no change in weight. Sedentary adults may weigh the 'correct' amount, but be overly fat because their muscles have atrophied from disuse. Likewise, people who embark on a vigorous exercise program may lose fat yet see no change or even an increase in their body weight.

Fat Requirements

Fat is very energy dense and therefore you only need to consume small amounts of fat to liberate a large amount of energy. Generally, fat intake should be between 25-30% of the total kilojoules consumed in the diet. In the case of people desiring body fat loss, this amount may be decreased



to 20%. In order to avoid the potential consequences of not receiving adequate fat for vital body functions, fat intake **should not** fall below 20%.

The easiest way to determine fat levels is by the number of grams in a particular food. This information can be found on the nutritional table on the packet, or in a fat counter book. Try to buy products that have the lowest fat content in that particular food type. Most natural food is low in fat (e.g. fruit, vegetables, rice, beans, wheat and other grain products). Therefore a diet based around natural foods is going to be naturally low in fat. Some processed foods, however, need to be added to the unprocessed products to provide a balanced diet. The problem is that processed foods are now so common due to their convenience that they are over-represented in many people's diets and this generally leads to an over supply of fat. This combined with a lack of exercise, causes fat to be stored. It is estimated that the average Australian is gaining 1 gram of fat per day.

There are different types of fat that have different effects on the body. In a typical Australian diet too many of our foods are high in saturated fats. These fats are the type that causes atherosclerosis or a build up of fat in the arteries that supply your heart with blood. Blockage of these arteries leads to angina pain or heart attack. Where possible you should consume 'heart friendly' fats like monounsaturated (e.g. olive oil) or polyunsaturated (e.g. fish oils) fats.

See over the page for ways to decrease fat in your diet.