

Food for Thought, Lard and Tallow, Healthy Fats?

To render simply [means](#) *to extract by melting*. You render fat by making it liquid, separating it from anything else, then allowing it to solidify. **Rendered fat has an advantage over raw meat; it has a shelf life.**

Tallow is fat rendered from beef, and lard is from pork. They are both solid at room temperature and have a very high smoke point, so they're great for frying. They're also quite healthy.

Health Benefits of Lard and Tallow

Ever heard someone say, "So-and-so ate bacon and eggs every morning and lived in good health until s/he was 90+..." That might be because the pork fat in bacon is *not an unhealthy fat*. Not only is saturated fat, like animal fats, actually helpful to your body's systems, but lard is flying under the radar with 51% [monounsaturated fat](#). You've seen those words before: mono- fats are the primary fat in olive oil, peanut butter, and avocados, some of the healthiest billed fatty foods in the land. So there. You can have your bacon and eat it too! (There is a catch. I'm so sorry. Keep reading.)

(Before you go on, be sure to read the [Health Benefits of Saturated Fat](#) post if you missed it. It's the keystone to accepting animal fats as less than garbage. Start with the [Fat Full Fall series](#) if you've missed a lot!)

Lard

- High in monounsaturated fat
- High in Vitamin D (also in the news a lot lately – we need it for immunities!)
- Strong bones (from Vitamin D)
- Good for skin – moisturizes from the inside (or on the outside, actually)

Tallow

- Almost 50% monounsaturated fat
- May have positive impact on reducing cancer growth
- Grassfed beef fat has a high concentration of "conjugated linoleic acid," or CLA, which is good for cholesterol levels. (See [here](#) for more.)

We are What our Food Eats: How to Find "Good Meat"

Finding tallow in your supermarket is probably as difficult as chasing down the cow and starting from scratch, and lard only slightly easier. Once you've found some, it's time to ask questions. **The quality of the fat is determined by the quality of what the animal ate.** Unfortunately, most supermarket meat is factory-grown, where the animals don't get exercise and have diets meant to make them fatter quicker. They are treated with antibiotics to prevent the spread of disease in crowded areas and hormones to speed up the process even more. (Not *always*, but you won't know unless you ask.) Toxins like these plus any chemicals on the animals' feed will concentrate in the fat, so more than any other time, we must know about the life of our food when we're buying animal fats.

Most supermarket lard is also hydrogenated to ensure shelf life and treated with preservatives like BHT and BHA, which have their own health issues.

This is “the catch” I spoke of: **you only want to eat lard or tallow from good sources.** Real lard needs refrigeration. You will probably have to go to a local butcher (or even a farm) to find a good source.

Here are (some) questions you should ask:

- What did the pigs eat? (Organic feed? Corn and soy? On pasture?)
- Were they able to roam freely to a certain extent?
- How is the lard processed? (Wet or dry? Hydrogenation? Preservatives?)
- Were the pigs treated with antibiotics or hormones?
- Best answers = pastured pigs, no soy, traditionally rendered lard with no additives or meds

Tallow has a similar list. **The cows should be grass-fed, entirely, if possible, with no meds.** Tallow does not need to be refrigerated at all if it’s used often enough and in an airtight container.

You Can Make Lard and Tallow Yourself!

The easy way:

The fat on the top of your homemade beef stock is tallow, as is, I believe, any liquid beef fat you come across. Scoop it off and save it for frying.

Bacon grease is a form of lard. If you have some local, pastured bacon, save that grease. It makes some recipes simply divine. I heard through the grapevine of a chef who said, “Put bacon grease in *anything* and all the customers love it!”

The not-so-hard but longer way:

Cheeseslave has an excellent post on [how to render lard and tallow](#). I’ll refer you to her! The [Wikipedia](#) article on the subject is actually quite good and lists a lot of the traditional ways lard can be used in cooking and baking.

How Did Lard and Tallow Get so Misrepresented?

Advertising. Marketing. Media. Even back at the turn of the century, companies realized that **if they could process and market something, they’d make more money** than if they just helped farmers sell their whole food products. The shortening industry mounted an effective attack on lard that has turned the tongues of Americans for 100 years.

Tallow didn’t fall from grace quite so hard.