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Coconut Oil:
A Nutrient Powerhouse and Metabolism Booster

Coconut oil is one of my most favorite foods! In our house we go through A LOT of coconut oil (almost a gallon in less than two months!) I add raw, organic, unrefined, virgin coconut oil to my daily green smoothies, I make homemade raw chocolate and tons of other desserts with it, I smear it on raw pecans and walnuts, and I use it for all my cooking needs. It's absolutely delicious, and incredibly nourishing. Besides its nutritional value, pure coconut oil also makes a luscious and soothing massage and body oil for skin and hair. It's the true definition of a superfood.

High quality, healthy fats are a major part of my own personal diet, and are one of the first subjects I like to educate my clients about. I wholeheartedly believe in eating the traditional fats our forefathers and other traditional societies have eaten for hundreds and even thousands of years. These traditional fats are rich in saturated fats, and include grass-fed, pastured meat and poultry, dairy, and eggs. In tropical climates it includes coconut oil and palm oil. Coconut oil is unique in nature because it is composed of about 50 percent lauric acid, a rare medium-chain fatty acid found in mother's milk that supports healthy metabolism and is now being studied for its anti-fungal, antiviral, and anti-bacterial, health-protecting properties.

Coconut: A Nutrient Powerhouse...

The Malaysian and Polynesian cultures have revered the coconut for centuries. Not only has this largest-known seed yielded food and water for hundreds of thousands of people, it also contains nearly all of the essential nutrients your body needs for optimal health. In addition to a whole host of amino acids (proteins), coconut is also a great source of the minerals potassium, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, and manganese, as well as vitamin C and riboflavin (vitamin B2). Coconut oil contains all of these nutrients and more. It also contains 90 percent saturated fat, which puts it right smack in the middle of the great fat debate.

The Saturated Oil Debate...

Unfortunately, this near perfect oil is often confused as a "bad" saturated fat. Many people (even some doctors and nutrition experts) will lump it in the category of "harmful fats" simply because it's solid at room temperature. Since the 1960s, coconut oil has been unfairly labeled as "unhealthy". The media reported studies of how tropical coconut oils were laden with artery-clogging saturated fats. What was left out of these reports was the fact that the coconut oil used in the studies was not the virgin oil used for centuries, but rather hydrogenated coconut oil. We have since learned it's the hydrogenation -- artificially adding a hydrogen molecule to oil in order to make it shelf-stable - that's the problem, not the coconut oil itself. Hydrogenated soy, corn, and canola oils - loaded with dangerous trans-fats and processed with toxic hexane solvents - are routinely added to packaged foods. Hydrogenation fattened corporate profits and American waistlines, and is now linked with trans-fats and associated heart disease.

Coconut oil is extracted from the dried flesh of the coconut. It is a source of plant-based saturated fat, the very fat doctors and nutritionists alike have been telling us to avoid like the plague. While it's true that coconut oil is 90 percent saturated fat, 45 percent of that fat is lauric acid, a medium-chain fatty acid that converts in

your body to monolaurin. Monolaurin is the actual compound found in breast milk that strengthens a baby's immune system. It is also known to promote normal brain development and contribute to healthy bones, as well as protect against viruses and bacteria[3]. Despite these purported health benefits, many opponents of coconut oil point to the high concentration of saturated fats as a reason to avoid it. While there is definitely an argument to avoid saturated fats coming from animals that have been raised using conventional feedlots and fed an unnatural diet of corn and soy, the fat in coconut oil is actually a medium-chain triglyceride. These fats are more easily digested than other fats and are quickly metabolized, giving you a great source of energy. Also, your body uses medium-chain triglycerides differently than other fats. Most fats are stored in your body's cells. But the fat in coconut oil gets shipped directly to your liver, where it is converted into energy and put to work to help you get up and get going.

Back to Those Benefits...

Let's take a closer look at the supposed health benefits. With regard to overall health, coconut oil benefits are hard to beat. Coconut appears to be anti-just-about-everything:

- Anti-inflammatory
- Anti-bacterial
- Anti-viral
- Anti-parasitic
- Anti-fungal
- Anti-pyretic (it reduces fever)
- Prevents heart disease
- Inhibits colon cancer and breast cancer
- Purifies the blood
- Helps with digestive problems
- Regulates blood sugar, especially for diabetics
- Major immune system booster
- Helps prevent osteoporosis, Crohn's Disease and hypoglycemia.
- Is fantastic for pediatric nutrition, especially in low weight children and infants.
- Promotes weight loss
- Works miracles for skin and hair (even by eating it)
- Makes food taste so delicious!

A pharmacological study[1] of virgin coconut oil found that it reduced inflammation in rats. The same study also found that when researchers induced hyperthermia (excess heat) in the rats, the coconut oil helped to reduce fever (anti-pyretic) and ease pain in the affected rats. Researchers concluded: "The results...suggest anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and antipyretic properties of virgin coconut oil." In other words, it reduced inflammation, eased pain, and reduced fever. That's not bad...for rats. However, we would love to see this type of study tested in humans. On the antifungal front, researchers studied the effect of coconut oil on Candida (the fungus common to yeast infections), as compared to fluconazole, a common antifungal drug[2]. Fifty-two different isolates of Candida were obtained from clinical specimens. Of these, Candida albicans was the most common isolate used. This is important, as this form is the common cause of diaper rash, vaginitis, thrush, and yeast infections. All isolates were tested to see how susceptible they were to both virgin coconut oil and the antifungal drug. Researchers found that Candida albicans had the highest susceptibility to coconut oil when the coconut oil had a 1:4 dilution, as compared to fluconazole, which needed a 1:2 dilution to be as effective. Translation: They needed less coconut oil, compared to the drug, to fend off the fungus. In simpler terms, the coconut oil worked better (in a smaller quantity) than the drug. Once again, nature beats man's inventions.

When it comes to antibacterial properties, one study in particular found that virgin coconut oil helped to treat skin infections.3 Researchers performed a double-blind, placebo-controlled study of 26 people who had atopic dermatitis, a skin condition that often includes painfully dry skin that is highly susceptible to a nasty bacterium called Staphylococcus aureus. Researchers had half the group use virgin coconut oil twice a day for four weeks at two non-infected sites. The other group used virgin olive oil, also applying it twice a day for four weeks. When the study started, 20 of the 26 participants tested positive for Staphylococcus aureus. At the end of the study period, only one of the virgin coconut oil users (5 percent) tested positive for the bacteria, as compared to six users (50 percent) in the olive oil group. The coconut oil also relieved the users' dry skin. Researchers concluded that coconut oil might be useful for treating bacteria, fungi, and viruses.

Heart and Weight Benefits Too...

Advocates of coconut oil also point to its cardio-protective and fat-burning properties, as well as its antibacterial benefits, etc. According to a population study[4] of about 2,500 people from the Polynesian islands of Tokelau and Pukapuka, high coconut oil intake has no effect on cholesterol levels.

Investigators tracked folks who consumed a high-fat diet derived primarily from coconuts - every meal contained coconut in one form or another. The researchers reported that the participants' overall health was very good, and that vascular disease was uncommon. In fact, even though these people were consuming high amounts of saturated fat in the form of coconut oil, they did not seem to have high cholesterol. Coronary heart disease, colon cancer, and other bowel disorders were rare as well. The lead researcher, Dr. Ian Prior, concluded that there was no evidence that high saturated fat intake from coconut oil had a harmful effect. This conclusion seems right, and then some. Not only does the coconut oil appear to not hurt, it also seems to be beneficial when it comes to gastrointestinal health. However, that cannot be stated conclusively without evaluating the participants' entire diet.

Interestingly, when it comes to weight loss, it appears that coconut oil's medium-chain triglycerides are the very reason it is effective. It turns out that when you eat coconut oil, your body uses it more quickly rather than storing it as body fat. In this way, those medium-chain triglycerides are thermogenic—meaning that they actually speed up your metabolism, burning more calories and giving you more energy. For example, according to several online sources, farmers from the 1940s wanted to fatten up their livestock, so they gave them coconut oil. However, the animals became leaner and more active. This is quite intriguing, but cannot be attributed to any credible source, but we did discover a human study that seems to back this up.

In a study of people in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, where coconut is a staple food, researchers found that their metabolic rate was an average of 25 percent higher than people in the U.S. However, like the farmers/livestock example, we cannot substantiate this commonly cited study either. Both appear to be perpetuated by the same author, who never cites the studies he is pulling from. Though the mechanism of action of medium-chain triglycerides and fat-burning makes sense physiologically, we were ready to dismiss the connection between coconut oil and weight loss due to a lack of clinical evidence. Then we came across several studies which included a randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blind study from Brazil[5]. Researchers tested the effects of coconut oil on 40 women between the ages of 20 to 40, with clinical abdominal obesity (waist circumference of more than 88 cm). Half of the group received a daily dose of either soybean oil or coconut oil for 12 weeks. Both of the groups were instructed to follow a balanced, low-calorie diet and to walk for 50 minutes each day. At the end of the study period, those taking the coconut oil had a statistically greater loss of waist circumference that those taking the soybean oil. The coconut oil users also had a statistically higher level of HDL (good) cholesterol and a lower LDL/HDL ratio than the soybean oil group. Both groups enjoyed a decrease in their body mass index (BMI). So, those using the coconut oil lost weight, lost inches around their waist, increased their levels of good cholesterol, and improved their cholesterol ratio. Not bad for a big seed!

Using Coconut Oil...

At the very least, it is clear that coconut is not bad for you and that there is a significant difference between the saturated fat in coconuts and the saturated fat in unhealthy animals. Also, there appears to be strong evidence that coconuts are an anti-viral, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, and anti-inflammatory food. Plus, the research behind its heart and weight benefits seems well founded. Therefore, we support the use of coconut oil...for health as well as taste. As it turns out, coconut oil is also a great option for cooking due to its high smoking point (350°F for unrefined and 450°F for refined). This is a culinary way of saying that you can sauté and bake with coconut oil and not worry about it turning into a trans-fat before your eyes. Plus, coconut oil is very stable. It has a two-year shelf life and won't turn rancid, even in warm temperatures. Make sure to use coconut oil in its raw form as well to get all the great benefits–stir a spoonful into your yogurt, kefir, or smoothie; use in your salad dressings; after steaming or sautéing stir a spoonful into your vegetables; stir into your scrambled eggs or any vegetable dish; or use on toast combined with raw nut butter for a delicious treat!

On the other hand, the WORST oils to use for cooking include:

- Vegetable Oil
- Canola Oil
- Cottonseed Oil
- Soybean Oil
- Safflower Oil
- Sunflower Oil
- Corn Oil

These popular cooking oils that you find at the grocery store are made by heating a once-natural oil to such high temperatures that it strips all the healthy nutrients out of the oil. Hydrogen atoms are then added to the oil (making your cooking oil a trans fat). When you bring that oil home and cook with it and dress your salads with it, it destroys the nutrients in your salads (or whatever you're using it on).

So give coconut oil a try. Just be sure to choose organic, raw, virgin coconut oil that is unrefined, unbleached, made without heat processing or chemicals, and is non-GMO. We are sure that after a few days with this outstanding oil, you'll be loco for coconut, too!

Did you know?...

- Substituting coconut oil for vegetable oil in all your cooking is one of the best things you can do to help your thyroid gland, control your weight and brighten your mood.
- Coconut oil increases the body's metabolism, as it takes more energy to metabolize the medium chain fatty acids (MCFAs) than the MCFAs provide. Eating meals containing MCFAs can increase your metabolic rate. When MCFAs are consumed, they are immediately converted into energy by the liver, not circulated in the bloodstream as lipoproteins, which then may be deposited as fat.
- A diet composed of saturated and monosaturated fats (butter, lard, coconut oil and olive oil) helps protect against heart disease, cancer, diabetes, arthritis and many other degenerative diseases.
- Heavy metals and other toxins in the body are eliminated by binding to dietary fats such as coconut oil, butter, and olive oil.
- Coconut oil contains the right kinds of fats that insulate the nerves, helping them to function normally.
- Coconut oil has been and often still is a main ingredient in baby formula (Coconut oil contains lauric acid, an important fatty acid that is abundantly found in breast milk).

References

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