

It's About Eating Right

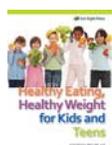
In This Section

[Healthy Weight](#)
[Food & Nutrition Topics](#)
[Diseases, Allergies & Health Conditions](#)
[Children's Health](#)
[Women's Health](#)
[Men's Health](#)
[Healthy Aging](#)
[Seasonal & Holidays](#)
[Sports & Exercise](#)
[Food Safety](#)
[Resources in Other Languages](#)
[What Is an RD?](#)

Popular Diet Reviews



Featured Product



Special Feature

[MORE INFO](#)

Healthy Eating, Healthy Weight for Kids and Teens

Using a family-friendly approach, the authors present eight Academy-backed strategies for managing weight.

Tip of the Day

[Like](#) 160 [Tweet](#) 56

81

Coconut Oil – What Is It All About?

By Jackie Newgent, RDN, CDN

Extra-virgin olive oil consistently tops the list in popularity when it comes to culinary oils. But these days coconut oil seems to be stealing the spotlight. Health claims abound around this tropical oil, but so does controversy. So what is it all about? Here are some facts about coconut oil.

Where Does Coconut Oil Come From?

There are two main types of coconut oil that you can use in cooking and baking: Virgin and refined.

“Virgin” coconut oil is extracted from the fruit of fresh mature coconuts without using high temperatures or chemicals; it’s considered unrefined.

“Refined” coconut oil is made from dried coconut meat that’s often chemically bleached and deodorized.

Some food manufacturers may use yet another form of coconut oil that’s further processed: partially hydrogenated coconut oil.

Nutritional Properties of Coconut Oil

The coconut oil that you’ll find on supermarket shelves, whether virgin or refined, is high in saturated fat — more so than butter. In fact, it’s considered a solid fat. One tablespoon of coconut oil provides 117 calories, 13.6g total fat (11.8g saturated fat, 0.8g monounsaturated fat, 0.2g polyunsaturated fat), no protein or carbohydrates, and trace amounts of iron and vitamins E and K. Like all other plant-based oils, it doesn’t contain cholesterol. With the exception of palm kernel oil, all other common culinary oils, including canola, corn, safflower, sunflower, soybean, flaxseed, grapeseed and extra-virgin olive oil, contain significantly less saturated fat than coconut oil. On a positive note, coconut oil, specifically virgin coconut oil, has some antioxidant properties, potentially because of plant nutrients called phenolic compounds.

What about partially hydrogenated coconut oil? Be cautious of processed food products, such as commercial baked goods, that contain this type of the oil. The further processing of coconut oil transforms some of the unsaturated fats into trans fats.

Is it Healthy or Unhealthy?

There’s a lot of health “hype” surrounding coconut oil. These claims tout the benefits of coconut oil for everything from weight loss to Alzheimer’s disease. The truth is that there isn’t yet enough scientific evidence to support all of these claims about coconut oil’s potential health benefits.

When it comes to fats, most of what you eat should be monounsaturated or polyunsaturated, like you find in nuts, seeds and avocados. The American Heart Association recommends limiting the amount of saturated fats in your diet to less than seven percent of your total daily calories and limiting trans fat intake to less than 1 percent of total daily calories. These guidelines have been established because saturated fats, in general, and trans fats are associated with increased total cholesterol and low density lipoprotein (LDL) “bad” cholesterol, as well as increased risk of coronary artery disease.

However, virgin coconut oil is high in lauric acid, which is a saturated fat that’s classified as a medium-chain fatty acid; it can raise both “bad” and “good” cholesterol levels. And there’s some preliminary evidence — including both animal and human studies — suggesting that coconut oil intake may be associated with a neutral, if not beneficial, effect on cholesterol levels.

The bottom line? Skip food products that contain partially hydrogenated coconut oil. Choose virgin coconut oil and use it in moderation. Despite emerging research, the recommendation is still to limit your total saturated fat intake.

Cooking with Coconut Oil

Virgin (or unrefined) coconut oil has a very light, sweet-nutty coconut flavor and aroma. It’s ideal for baking or medium-heat sautéing — up to about 350°F. It’s a good culinary choice when preparing curries or other dishes that benefit from a slight tropical flavor.

Refined coconut oil is basically tasteless. It can be used for baking or for medium-high heat sautéing or stir-frying — up to about 425°F. It’s an option when you need a cooking fat with a neutral flavor.

Though high in saturated fat, virgin coconut oil doesn’t contain trans fat, making it a better choice than trans fat-containing shortening. And for vegans or strict vegetarians, coconut oil offers a plant-based replacement for butter that stands up well in baking or sautéing.

Like other oils, coconut oil should be stored well sealed and in a cool, dark place. It solidifies when too cool, but quickly liquefies when warmed up.

Reviewed June 2013

Jackie Newgent, RDN, CDN, is a Brooklyn-based culinary nutritionist, writer, and media personality. She’s author of several cookbooks



and blogs at Tasteovers by Jackie.

Stay Involved	Blogs	Social Communities	Surveys			Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo October 19-22, 2013 Houston, TX
Stay Connected	E-Newsletter	RSS Feeds	Podcasts	Videos		

Quick Links

- [Join the Academy shop](#)
- [KidsEatRight](#)
- [FNCE 2013](#)
- [Food and Nutrition Magazine](#)
- [Journal](#)



The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation is the world's largest charitable organization (501c3) focused on food, nutrition and dietetics. Academy Foundation is dedicated to working with the Registered Dietitian to help kids and their families eat right.

[Visit site](#) [Make a donation](#)



Participate in the only political action committee broadly focused on food, nutrition and health. If dietetics is your profession, politics is your business!

[Visit site](#) [Make a donation](#)



Through accreditation and approval of more than 600 undergraduate and graduate didactic, dietetic technician and supervised practice programs, the Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education ensures entry-level education meets quality standards.

[Visit site](#)



The Commission on Dietetic Registration awards credentials to individuals at entry and specialty levels who have met CDR's standards for competency to practice in the dietetics profession.

[Visit site](#)