



ASHEVILLE INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

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Coconut's Comeback

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After decades of banishment, coconut oil is again being recognized as a healthy dietary oil. Coconuts and their extracted oil have been a valued food source for many cultures, spanning many centuries. The common misconception that coconut oil, a medium chain saturated fat, is “bad” stems from a successful propaganda campaign by the food industry to promote margarine and other refined polyunsaturated oils over the previously-used saturated and tropical oils.

Health-conscious consumers are now aware that not all fats are the same-- there are good fats, and there are bad fats. They can tell you that Omega 3 (flax and fish oils) and Omega 6 (evening primrose) fats are essential for optimal health. They know that organic butter in moderation is actually good for you, and that one of the best cooking oils is extra virgin olive oil. And an educated consumer knows that the bad fats are the refined hydrogenated/ trans-fats, so ubiquitous in packaged and mass-produced foods. Yet still, the oft-repeated dogma of “bad saturated fats” dies slowly.

Saturated fats have received so much negative press that one would think they, rather than the trans-fats, are the new-fangled alien molecule, poisonous to the human system. In fact, saturated fats are the bodies naturally produced fats and are found in some cell membranes at levels of about 50%. Saturated fats, along with cholesterol, are the primary material of the brain. Accomplished scientists recognize that while some saturated fats do raise cholesterol levels, this effect is not the main cause of heart disease. They also recognize that the trans-fats raise cholesterol levels even more than saturated fats.

Numerous studies have reported that the dietary use of coconut oil neither leads to detrimental cholesterol profiles nor to heart disease. Tropical cultures whose diets are high in coconut oil actually have very low rates of heart disease. Coconut oil and fish oils are the only oils that don't increase platelet stickiness that can lead to blood clots. Another benefit of coconut oil is that it's the least vulnerable of all dietary oils to oxidation and free radical formation—key factors in heart disease and aging.

Coconut oil has many other health attributes. It's easily used by our bodies for energy and it does not contribute to weight gain as much as other oils. Coconut oil, like fish oil, is anti-inflammatory. Coconuts are one of the richest sources of antibacterial, antiviral, and anti-parasitic-fighting fats, primarily in the form of lauric acid. Mother's breast milk is rich with these same germ-fighting fats. The lauric acid fats in coconut can destroy viruses such as HIV, measles, herpes, hepatitis C, influenza, Epstein-Barr viruses and bacteria such as h.pylori, staph, strep, and h.flu. The fats found in coconut oil have already been found useful with epilepsy, inflammatory intestinal disorders like Crohns, for nourishing seriously burned or critically ill patients, with epilepsy, and in commercial baby formulas.

When you look for coconut oil to use in your diet be sure it is un-hydrogenated (should be liquid at 76 degrees). You can derive the benefits of coconut oil by using 1-3 tablespoons a day. It can be used in place of butter or vegetable oils to make popcorn, drizzled on your steamed veggies, on your toast or in your oatmeal, for baking, for sautéing, even in a smoothie. To learn more about coconut oil see *Know Your Fats* by Mary Enig, PhD., *The Healing Miracles of Coconut Oil* by Bruce Fife, ND, and www.coconut-info.com.