



Coconut Oil – The latest health hype, or is it really good for us?

Lately there has been a spotlight shining on coconut oil, in some articles and websites it is being hailed a 'superfood', and in others a 'cure' for all sorts, from 'easing digestion' to 'slowing signs of ageing'. Unfortunately there is a lot of conflicting advice from various sources, which makes it difficult to establish if coconut oil does have health benefits or not.

So, what do we know about coconut oil? Well, we know it's approximately 90% saturated fat, which is higher than butter. We also know that too much saturated fat in the diet causes LDL (bad) cholesterol levels to increase, and raised levels of LDL cholesterol compared to HDL (good) cholesterol increases our risk of heart disease.

The interesting thing about coconut oil is that there is some research suggesting the type of saturated fat it contains is about half Lauric acid, and this is thought to have a good effect on HDL cholesterol, but, the research so far is mainly in animal studies and looking at other similar fats not coconut oil specifically.

What's the general consensus? The advice from the Dietitians Association of Australia, the Heart Foundation, and Dr Willett from the Harvard School of Public Health, is that there isn't enough evidence, and therefore recommend keeping all saturated fat intake to a minimum. This means to use all saturated fats, including coconut oil, sparingly.

So what oils and fats should I choose instead? Healthier oils are those which are monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Examples of monounsaturated oils are olive oil, canola oil, avocado, almonds, cashews, and peanuts. Examples of polyunsaturated oils (omega-6 & omega-3) are oily fish, tahini, linseed, sunflower oil, pine nuts, and walnuts.

The Heart Foundation recommends: 'two or three serves (150 grams per serve) of oily fish every week. Walnuts and ground linseeds can be added to stir fries or sprinkled on breakfast cereal.'

For more information take a look at The Heart Foundation – 'Fats & Cholesterol' website page. There is information on healthy fats, cholesterol, trans-fats, and omega-3. There are also a range of recipes available and tips on how to get the right balance in your diet. **Enjoy!**

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