

The Wellness Family

Dr. Tara Buchakjian Keeps You Informed

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Cooking Oils

You've taken the time to buy really fresh vegetables, to dice them up into a delicious mix so that you and your family can eat healthier and feel better. However, the decision of what oil to cook them in is equally important. The wrong cooking oil can turn a healthy mix of fresh vegetables into an unhealthy mix of mush.

All About Oils

There are several different choices of oils depending upon whether you're baking, cooking, marinating, flavoring or garnishing. The right choice is going to depend on the purpose: i.e. the food you are preparing and how it's being prepared.

When baking, your healthiest choices include coconut, palm and canola, but high oleic safflower and sunflower oil are the best for this purpose. When frying choose avocado, palm and sesame oil because they stand up so well to high temperatures. When sautéing your oil choices are almost unlimited as all of the aforementioned will work great.

Dips, dressings, marinades and garnishes are slightly limited in that you're looking for a terrific stand-alone flavor. In this case consider flax, olive, toasted sesame or walnut oil.

Creating Cooking Oils

There are several different types of cooking oils and they are generally extracted from the following:

- Seeds – safflower, sunflower, sesame, etc.
- Fruits – avocado, olive, palm, coconut, etc.
- Nuts – almond, hazelnut, peanut, walnut, etc.
- Vegetables – corn, soybean, etc.

The most common basic method for extraction is to clean, grind and then press the oil from the source (plant, seed or fruit), but there are a few special cases that involve squeezing the oil straight from the flesh of the fruit of the plant. For example, coconut oil comes from the coconut's white meat, palm oil from the pulp of palm fruit, and olive oil from the flesh of fresh olives.

Olive Oil

Produced by pressing the flesh of olives, this oil has become known as the "healthy cooking oil" and it is, certainly. If the alternative is the standard grocery store fodder, vegetable oil, then olive oil is definitely a vast dietary improvement.

This particular plant oil is one of the few cooking oils that contains about 75% of its fat as oleic acid (a monounsaturated, omega-9 fatty acid). If you have typically been using corn oil or vegetable oil, research has shown that altering your diet by replacing that choice with olive oil may lead to a significant decrease in your total blood cholesterol and an improved LDL:HDL ratio.

Olive oil does have one downside and that is its tendency to degrade in a very short amount of time, especially if stored in a warm place (like a kitchen). In just a month or so, stored olive oil will begin to breakdown and eventually go rancid. Food cooked with rancid olive oil will have a bad aftertaste. Although it's



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not necessarily harmful, the taste of the food prepared will be poor and the oil itself will have lost most of its important nutrients.

To tell if your olive oil has gone rancid, smell it. If it has a stale smell like old peanuts or putty, then discard it. To avoid this problem, purchase olive oil in small amounts, especially if it's not something you use a lot.

This oil is one of your best choices to use as a salad dressing and a great sauté option, but not a good choice for frying or baking.

Coconut Oil

Coconut oil is an edible plant oil pressed from the fruit of the palm tree and is ideal for light fair and subtly flavored dishes. While olive oil is pretty well known as the "healthy oil" this choice can give it a run for its money. Once considered a "fatty and unhealthy" choice, Bruce Fife, ND, has spent many years researching and studying coconut oil and has found it's actually quite the opposite.

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While coconut oil does in fact have a high fat content, the fatty acids are classified as medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs), while most of the fats in our diet come from long-chain fatty acids. Why does this matter? Medium-chain fatty acids are more easily digested, preferentially used by the liver to produce energy and the kinds of fats found in breast milk.

A typical concern for those unfamiliar with using this oil is whether or not it will affect the flavor of the food. The oil itself is a very light oil and does not have a strong or clingy flavor so there is no concern that it will overpower or affect the taste of the food items being prepared.

A further benefit of this antioxidant containing cooking oil is that it has an impressive shelf-life, especially when compared to olive oil. Oil left in a cupboard for a year showed no signs of degradation or rancidity.

Of course, coconut oil doesn't just have amazing health benefits when used for cooking; patients have even reported an improvement in eczema symptoms when this oil has been applied to a break out.

As a side note, while coconut oil is beneficial there isn't enough research at this time to determine whether having a coconut allergy means that you will have a coconut oil allergy. If you are one of the rare few that has a coconut allergy, please carefully consider whether or not to use this oil.

Canola Oil

Surprisingly, canola is a cousin to cabbage and brussel sprouts. Low in saturated fats and rich in monounsaturated fats, canola oil contains many important nutrients including an essential omega-3 fat that tends to be deficient in most diets. This makes

canola oil one of, if not the best choice, for sautéing, light cooking and baking.

Canola oil should be purchased in quantities close to what you expect to be using as it stores for about 4 to 6 months in a dark cupboard and 9 months in the refrigerator before beginning to degrade.

Other Oils

There are many other oils to consider when cooking; in fact, your choices are quite abundant. Avocado oil is pressed from avocados and, as it's more than 50% monounsaturated, a heart-healthy choice to be used in salad dressings and sautéing.

While this oil is also one that has been suggested as a great option for frying, fried foods are generally unhealthy due to that choice of preparation.

Grapeseed oil is extracted from the seeds of grapes, and is actually a byproduct of the wine-making industry. This oil is fantastic on salads or served with raw veggies in dips, sauces and salsas.

In Summary

When you consider the number of cooking oil options that are beneficial to your health, there are plenty of reasons to avoid those that aren't. For instance, vegetable oil is pretty much made up of various plant parts and isn't going to be a refined cooking oil with measurable beneficial nutrients. Then there's corn oil, typically made from the kernel. Corn is a grain, not a fruit or vegetable, and as an oil is not a healthy source of grains.

When deciding to prepare healthy, living foods for your family remember this important fact: the oil you choose when cooking your food is just as important as the food you're cooking.

Dear Patient,

Dr. Tara Buchakjian is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.

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