



Coconut oil

What is coconut oil? It is obtained from the flesh of a coconut

What type of fat is it? Coconut oil is a saturated fat as is butter, lard and other animal fats. However, it is made up slightly differently. Animal saturated fats are made of short chain triglycerides whereas coconut oil is made of medium chained triglycerides (MCT's) and it is this difference that suggests it may possess some health properties.

What are the health claims?

- There are over 1,500 studies that have been conducted on coconut oil to understand their potential health properties. However, it is worth bearing in mind that each study is different in its size, environment (many are conducted on animals with a smaller number being conducted on humans) and compared against different foods, nutrients or health conditions. Each one tells us something different and they don't all provide the same conclusion.
- The main health benefits some scientists have found in their studies are due to the MCT's that it contains. It seems that these oils may assist in reducing risk of heart disease, help with weight management by reducing appetite and boosting metabolism and help increase 'healthy' (HDL) cholesterol levels without raising 'unhealthy' (LDL) levels
- Coconut oil also contains lauric acid which has antimicrobial and antibacterial properties and therefore is thought it may help the body to combat a wide spectrum of bacteria and viruses that can cause infections such as colds, gum disease, flu, ulcers and urinary tract infections

What conclusions do the research actually provide?

- It seems that coconut oil may help to increase metabolism and help overweight people to lose weight and although coconut oil seems to raise LDL cholesterol more than some other fats, it seems to have a consistent effect in increasing HDL cholesterol
- **HOWEVER** these health claims are based on a limited number of studies and how a person consumes and responds to different fats can vary a lot from individual to individual and more larger scale studies are needed to provide more conclusive evidence.
- Some of the research studies along with the opinions of some medical professionals have been provided in the references at the end

FINAL WORD It seems that including small amount in your diet as part of your daily allowance of saturated fat may be the most appropriate way to provide some potential health benefits until we know more from research. The government recommends no more than 30g of saturated fats for men and 20g for women per day (20g of fat is around 1 tablespoon of oil).

What is the best coconut oil? Virgin coconut oil is not chemically treated (refined, bleached or deodorised) so its MCT's remain intact.

How do I use it? Coconut is very stable when heated at high temperatures so may be a good alternative for frying foods. 1/2 tsp per person when frying should be sufficient.

References

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