

# How Coconut Oil Can Benefit Your Health

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Saturated fats, and most particularly coconut oil, are an important part of the human diet. Research suggests coconut oil may help control Crohn's disease by improving your gut microbiome
- › Studies show coconut oil supports healthy thyroid function, promotes heart health and healthy brain function, boosts immune function and energy, aids weight loss and even disintegrates viral membranes of SARS-Co-V
- › Coconut oil is an excellent choice for cooking, as it can resist heat-induced damage. Processed vegetable oils produce oxidized cholesterol and toxic cyclic aldehydes and acrylamide when heated
- › Bulletproof coffee is a brain-boosting high-performance beverage you can easily make by adding MCT oil or coconut oil and grass fed, unsalted butter or ghee to black, organic coffee
- › Coconut oil can also replace a number of pricy and potentially hazardous personal care products, including moisturizers, hair masks, shaving lotion, cleansers and makeup removers, body scrub, toothpaste and much more

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Despite the fact that more than 2,000 studies<sup>1</sup> have been performed on coconut oil, demonstrating a wide range of benefits, it continues to be wrongfully vilified to this day,

mainly because 90% of its fat content is saturated fat. However, saturated fats, and most particularly coconut oil, are an important part of the human diet. If you have bought into the media hype that saturated fats are unhealthy and will raise your risk of heart disease, it may be time to reconsider your position.

Coconut products, particularly coconut oil, have been used by certain populations around the world for millennia, and in places where coconut oil is consumed as part of the standard diet, people seem to thrive.

Take the Polynesian populations of Pukapuka and Tokelau, for example, whose diets tend to be high in coconut and other saturated fats and low in cholesterol and sugar. Here, researchers found that "vascular disease is uncommon in both populations and there is no evidence of the high saturated fat intake having a harmful effect."<sup>2</sup>

Another study<sup>3</sup> focused on the Kitava in Papua New Guinea. Besides eating a lot of fish, fruit and tubers, coconut is also a prominent staple. None of the indigenous people in this study reported stroke, sudden death, chest pain or discomfort due to coronary heart disease (CHD).

In fact, the researchers concluded that stroke and CHD appeared to be absent in this population. Aside from its internal health benefits, coconut oil also has countless other uses. You can rely on it for topical beauty applications, for example, thereby avoiding any number of hazardous chemicals.

## **How Coconut Oil Can Benefit Your Health and Well-Being**

Nutritionally speaking, the healthy fats found in coconut oil can have significant effects on your well-being. Research has shown it can:

**Support healthy thyroid function** – Unlike soy oil and other vegetable oils, coconut oil does not interfere with thyroid function. It has anti-inflammatory properties that can help reduce inflammation that may lead to hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism.<sup>4</sup>

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**Promote heart health** — Animal and human studies have found that heart disease risk factors such as LDL and HDL cholesterol levels may be improved by taking coconut oil.<sup>5</sup> In particular, coconut oil's saturated fats may increase "good" HDL cholesterol, while also helping convert "bad" LDL cholesterol into a less harmful form.<sup>6</sup>

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**Promote healthy brain function** — Researchers found that ketones may work as an alternative energy source for malfunctioning brain cells, which has been found to reduce symptoms in patients with Alzheimer's disease.<sup>7</sup>

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**Boost immune function** — The lauric acid, antimicrobial lipids, capric acid and caprylic acid that coconut oil contains are known for their antifungal, antibacterial and antiviral properties.<sup>8</sup> Regularly using it may help prevent colds/flu, and alleviate illnesses like hepatitis C, herpes and the Epstein-Barr virus.<sup>9</sup>

Research published in March 2021 also showed that the lauric acid in coconut oil disintegrates viral membranes of SARS-Co-V, inhibits the virus' maturation and prevents binding of viral proteins to host cell membranes.<sup>10</sup>

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**Boost energy** — The medium-chain fatty acids (MCTs) in coconut oil are immediately digested and converted into energy by your liver.

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**May support healthy metabolism** — Some animal studies have shown coconut oil may raise metabolism.<sup>11</sup>

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**Aid weight loss** — Coconut oil provides an excellent fuel for your body and stimulates your metabolism to help you shed excess body fat.

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**Aid digestion** — Coconut oil is easy on your digestive system and will not produce an insulin spike in your bloodstream. The MCTs can also be absorbed easily in your digestive tract, compared to longer chain fatty acids found in polyunsaturated vegetable oils.

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**Control Crohn's disease** — Research shows healthy plant-derived fats such as

coconut oil can bring about positive changes in your gut bacteria, decreasing the symptoms of Crohn's disease, an often debilitating condition.

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**Maintain healthy, youthful looking skin** – Applying coconut oil topically benefits your skin, reducing the appearance of wrinkles and fine lines as the oil keeps your connective tissues strong and supple. Limited evidence also suggests it may boost collagen production,<sup>12</sup> although the mechanism of action is unknown.

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**Control candida** – A study published in mSphere found that mice given coconut oil had a tenfold drop in the colonization of *Candida albicans* yeast in their gut, compared to mice given soybean oil or beef tallow.<sup>13</sup>

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**Promote oral health** – One study found that massaging coconut oil on your gums for 10 minutes a day for three weeks significantly reduces plaque and decay-causing *Streptococcus mutans*.<sup>14</sup>

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## Use Coconut Oil for Cooking

Coconut oil is an excellent choice for cooking, as it can resist heat-induced damage. This way, you're not consuming damaged, oxidized oils. Processed vegetable oils, on the other hand, such as soybean, corn, cottonseed and canola oil, produce oxidized cholesterol when heated, which increases thromboxane formation – a factor that clots your blood, as well as two toxins: cyclic aldehydes and acrylamide.

It's beyond unfortunate that the American Heart Association (AHA) decided to slow down much-needed progress by sending out its international presidential advisory<sup>15</sup> warning against the use of coconut oil and butter, reiterating its old recommendation to use polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) such as margarine and vegetable oil instead.

Overall, the AHA still recommends limiting your daily saturated fat intake to 5 to 6% of your daily calories, based on a 2,000 calorie-a-day diet.<sup>16</sup> In my opinion, this is far below what your body needs for optimal health.

This advisory was sharply criticized by many health experts, and for good reason. For starters, the studies on which the advisory was based all date from the 1960s and early 1970s – the eras when the low-fat myth was born and grew to take hold. Many studies since then have demolished and refuted the science the AHA still clings to, but none of them were included.

According to Dr. Cate Shanahan,<sup>17</sup> a family physician and author of "Deep Nutrition: Why Your Genes Need Traditional Food," the AHA's message "is not only false, it is dangerous," noting that the AHA is actually making false claims since none of the studies included in their analysis involved coconut oil specifically.

It's also worth noting that most of the early studies on coconut oil that found less than favorable results used partially hydrogenated coconut oil, not unrefined virgin coconut oil.<sup>18</sup> Hydrogenated oil is not the same as unrefined oil, even when you're talking about something as healthy as coconut. This little detail is what led to the undeserved vilification of coconut oil in the first place.



## Why Vegetable Oils Are a Hazardous Choice

Modern research is just now starting to reveal what actually happens at the molecular level when you consume vegetable oil and margarine, and it's clear that these fats are not doing your heart any favors.

For example, Sanjoy Ghosh,<sup>19</sup> a biologist at the University of British Columbia, has shown your mitochondria cannot easily use PUFAs for fuel due to the fats' unique

molecular structure. Other researchers have shown the PUFA linoleic acid can cause cell death in addition to hindering mitochondrial function.<sup>20</sup>

PUFAs are also not readily stored in subcutaneous fat. Instead, they tend to get deposited in your liver, where they contribute to fatty liver disease, and in your arteries, where they contribute to atherosclerosis.

According to Frances Sladek,<sup>21</sup> Ph.D., a toxicologist and professor of cell biology at UC Riverside, PUFAs behave like a toxin that builds up in tissues because your body cannot easily rid itself of them. When vegetable oils like sunflower oil and corn oil are heated, cancer-causing chemicals like aldehydes are also produced.<sup>22</sup>

So, in summary, if your aim is better heart health, ignore the AHA's ignorant and prejudiced advice on dietary fats and cooking oils. It'll lead you in the complete opposite direction.

While the AHA claims replacing saturated fats with PUFAs will cut your risk of heart disease, CHD rates have not improved in the decades that people have followed its recommendations on fat intake. Common sense tells us if the AHA's advice hasn't worked in the last 65 years, it's not likely to start working now.

## **Medium-Chain Triglycerides and Their Health Benefits**

Ninety percent of the fat in coconut oil is saturated and about two-thirds of the fats are medium-chain fats, also referred to as MCTs. MCTs get their name from their chemical structure, and can be divided into four groups based on their carbon length:

- 6 carbons (C6), caproic acid
- 8 carbons (C8), caprylic acid
- 10 carbons (C10), capric acid
- 12 carbons (C12), lauric acid

Clinical uses of MCT oil (typically a combination of C8 and C10, which increase ketone levels far more effectively than the others) include:

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Appetite reduction and weight loss<sup>23,24</sup>

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Improved cognitive and neurological function with possible implications in neurodegenerative diseases

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Increased energy levels and improved athletic performance

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Improved mitochondrial function and subsequent reduced risk for diseases such as atherosclerosis, diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease and autoimmune diseases

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As part of a specialized dietary therapy for the treatment of epilepsy<sup>25</sup>

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Prevention of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease<sup>26</sup>

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As a general rule, the shorter the carbon chain, the more efficiently the MCT is converted into ketones, which are an excellent mitochondrial fuel. Ketones can even pass the blood-brain barrier to supply your brain with energy. They're a far preferable fuel than glucose, as they produce fewer reactive oxygen species and secondary free radicals when burned.

Ketones also help suppress the hunger hormone ghrelin, and as your ketone level rises, CCK, a satiety hormone, is activated. As a result, food cravings and hunger pangs vanish, which will go a long way toward avoiding unnecessary snacking. MCTs also:

- Have a thermogenic effect, which has a positive effect on your metabolism
- Are helpful for ridding your gut of harmful microorganisms like pathogenic bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites
- Have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties

## **MCT Oil – Another Healthy Alternative**

Coconut oil provides a mix of all of these MCTs, but the longer-chained C12 (lauric acid) makes up over 40% of it. (The exception is fractionated coconut oil, which contains primarily C8 and C10.<sup>27</sup>) Lauric acid is most well-known for its antibacterial, antimicrobial and antiviral properties. Since it's a longer-chained molecule, it does not increase ketone levels to any significant degree.

While coconut oil provides a range of MCTs, for clinical uses such as those listed above, a more concentrated and potent MCT oil is recommended. Most commercial brands of MCT oil contain a 50/50 combination of C8 and C10. My personal preference is straight C8 (caprylic acid), as it converts to ketones the fastest. It also tends to be easier on your digestion.

Concentrated MCT oil and/or coconut oil can both be consumed daily, but start with a small amount. Taking high doses of MCT oil before you develop tolerance can cause loose stools and gastrointestinal side effects.

I recommend taking no more than 1 teaspoon of MCT oil to start. Have it at the same time as another fat, such as a handful of nuts, with ghee in your coffee, or as one of the oils in your salad dressing. Once your tolerance increases, you can slowly increase to as much as 4 tablespoons of MCT oil or coconut oil per day.

If you stop taking it for a while and then restart, begin with a small amount again to allow your digestive system to readjust. That said, MCT oil is often more easily digested by those struggling to digest other types of fat, such as those with malabsorption, leaky gut, Crohn's disease or gallbladder impairment (such as an infection or if you had your gallbladder removed).

## **Upgrade Your Coffee Creamer**

Many people who drink coffee do so with all kinds of additives, often referred to just as "cream and sugar". Nondairy creamer can scarcely be called "cream" at all and is more



aptly described as a synthetic combination of chemicals, trans fats, high-fructose corn syrup and artificial flavors. Give your coffee an upgrade by adding some grass fed butter, MCT oil or C8 to it. You can also make this brain-boosting high-performance beverage found on the Bulletproof blog:<sup>28</sup>

### Procedure

1. Brew 1 cup (8 to 12 ounces) of coffee using filtered water with 2 1/2 heaping tablespoons of freshly ground organic coffee beans. A French press will help preserve beneficial oils in the coffee that would otherwise be filtered out.
2. Add anywhere from 1 teaspoon to 2 tablespoons of C8 MCT oil. Alternatively, you could use organic coconut oil.
3. Add 1 to 2 tablespoons of grass fed, unsalted butter or grass fed ghee.
4. Mix the ingredients in a blender for 20 to 30 seconds until it looks like a foamy latte.

## Explore the Many Uses for Coconut Oil

Keeping a jar of organic coconut oil on hand could save you a lot of money since it replaces a wide variety of other products, both in the kitchen and elsewhere. As mentioned, coconut oil is not only a beneficial food. It can also replace a number of pricy and potentially hazardous personal care products, including moisturizers, hair masks, shaving lotion, cleansers and makeup removers, body scrub, toothpaste and much more.

If you've been fooled into going on a low-fat diet, or follow advice that recommends vegetable oils over coconut oil or butter, please look at the evidence and reconsider your options. Saturated fats will not make you pack on pounds; nor will it raise your risk for heart disease. On the contrary, saturated fat, such as that found in coconut oil, offers

many health benefits, including improved heart health. If you don't believe it, try it out for yourself.

Swap all of those margarine spreads and processed vegetable oils you're using for coconut oil. After about three months or so, recheck your blood levels and compare your results. Chances are, you'll find yourself in a lower risk category for heart disease than you were before, even if your total cholesterol (which says nothing about your heart disease risk) happens to go up. A simple way to get more coconut oil into your diet is to add it to your coffee or smoothie in the morning.

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