

# The Wellness Express™



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Issue 2, August 2014

## Coconut Oil – The Good, The Bad & The Yummy!

Presented by: Total Health Systems

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### Introduction

Coconut oil is an edible oil extracted from the meat of the palm coconut. Oil is processed by either a dry or wet process. The dry method dries coconut by fire, sun or kilns to create what is known as copra. It is then pressed or dissolved with solvents to obtain the oil.

In the wet process, raw coconut is mixed with water to form an emulsion. Various methods of separating the oil can be used but more often a centrifuge system is used. However the wet processing is not as efficient as dry and provides a lower yield compared to the dry processing.

Quality and yield of coconut oil depends on the age of the nut when harvested – anywhere from 2 to 20 months. Copra made from immature nuts produces an inferior product with lower yields. Approximately 3,170 lbs (1,440 kilograms) yield around 370 lbs (170 kilograms) of copra from which around 15 Imperial gallons (70 litres) of coconut oil can be extracted.

Virgin coconut oil (VCO) can be produced from fresh grated coconut meat that has been washed and partially dried, then manually pressed to extract the oil. To produce oil from coconut milk also involves grating then mixing with water and squeezing out the oil. Coconut oil makes up around 2.5% of world vegetable oil production.

### Health Concerns

As coconut oil has a high saturated fat content it can keep from spoiling for as long as 2 years. Because of this high fat content many health organizations advise against consuming a lot of coconut oil due to its high levels of saturated fat.

However, coconut oil contains a large proportion of lauric acid – a saturated fat that raises blood cholesterol levels by increasing the amount of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol and low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol. This may create a more favourable blood cholesterol profile, although it is unclear whether coconut oil may promote atherosclerosis in other ways.



**Good  
Bad  
Yummy**



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Because much of the saturated fat of coconut oil is in the form of lauric acid, coconut oil may be a better alternative to partially hydrogenated vegetable oil as opposed to solid fats. In addition, virgin coconut oil (VCO) is composed mainly of medium-chain triglycerides, which may not carry the same risks as other saturated fats. VCO has become increasingly popular in health and natural food circles and with vegans. Advocacy against coconut and palm oils in the 1970s and 1980s due to their perceived danger as a saturated fat caused companies to substitute trans fats instead, unaware of their health-damaging effects.

## Hydrogenation

Some coconut oil can be processed further into partially or fully hydrogenated oil to increase its melting point. In the process of hydrogenation, unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids) are combined with hydrogen in a catalytic process to make them more saturated. In the partial hydrogenation process, some of these are transformed into trans fatty acids.

## Fractionation

Fractionated coconut oil is a fraction of the whole oil, in which the different medium-chain fatty acids are separated for specific uses. Lauric acid, a 12-carbon chain fatty acid, is often removed because of its high value for industrial and medical purposes. The fractionation of coconut oil may be used to make caprylic/capric triglyceride oil some of which is most frequently used for medical applications, special diets, cosmetics and

sometimes as a carrier oil for fragrances.

## Various Uses

Coconut oil has been used for cooking (in tropical parts of the world) for thousands of years, especially for frying. In recent years, virgin coconut oil was described in a *New York Times* article as having a "haunting, nutty," flavor that has a touch of sweetness, which works well in baked goods, pastries, and sautés.

Coconut oil is used by movie theatre chains to pop popcorn, adding a large amount of saturated fat in the process. Coconut oil contains a large proportion of lauric acid, which is converted to monolaurin in the body, a fat otherwise found only in breast milk, however lauric acid is destroyed by some oil processing methods.

Other uses include replacing solid fats produced through hydrogenation in baked and confectionery foods. Hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated coconut oil is often used in non-dairy creamers and snack foods. Further uses include skin moisturizers, hair treatment to reduce protein loss and an important base for the making of soap.

## Conclusion:

Whether saturated fat is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a question with numerous controversial views. Although most in the mainstream heart-health, government, and medical communities hold that saturated fat is a risk factor for CVD, some recent studies have produced conflicting results.

## Quote to Inspire

*"The two basic items necessary to sustain life are sunshine and coconut milk."*

*Dustin Hoffman*

## References and Sources:

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