



Cooking Oils

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Anti-Inflammatory
Diet

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Accurate Education

Cooking Oils

The choice of cooking oil can depend on multiple variables, including its taste, smoking point, the temperature at which the oil begins to burn, the flavor of the oil and the texture of the food it is being used with. But it should also be based on health implications associated with the fats in the cooking oil, as some oils are healthier than others.

Types of Fat: Saturated, Polyunsaturated, Monounsaturated and Trans

There are four different types of fats associated with the oils we cook with. The Nutrition Facts label on each bottle of oil lists the fat content: saturated, polyunsaturated, monounsaturated and trans fats. Because of the links between saturated fats and heart disease and stroke, the American Heart Association recommends that **most** saturated fat in the diet be replaced with mono- and polyunsaturated fat and that trans fats be avoided altogether.

Saturated Fat

Saturated fat comes from meat, lard, and dairy, as well as some plant sources like coconut and palm. Saturated fat is solid at room temperature. There is a role for saturated fat in a healthy lifestyle, but it be used sparingly because of its link to poor health and it is recommended to limit animal-based saturated fats as much as possible.

Polyunsaturated Fat

Polyunsaturated fat tends to be higher in omega-6 than omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-6 fats are not unhealthy unless in excess. It is recommended that the ratio of Omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids in the diet be approximately 5-6:1, with higher ratios linked to more inflammation. Healthier polyunsaturated oils contain more omega-3s and less omega-6s.

Mono-unsaturated Fat

Oils high in the healthier monounsaturated fatty acids are staples of the anti-inflammatory diet. Monounsaturated fats tend to be higher in omega-3s than other types of oil and they usually solidify when refrigerated. Oils high in monounsaturated fats include olive, avocado, sunflower and safflower oils.

Trans fats

Trans fats are unsaturated fatty acids found in both natural and industrial sources. They can be harmful to your health and increase the risk of heart disease. Trans fats can be found in many commercial foods, including baked goods, fried foods, frozen pizza, microwave popcorn, and margarine. Eggs are low in both saturated and trans fats and peanut butter does not contain trans fats. Restaurants and bakeries have reduced or eliminated the use of trans fats.

Choosing a Cooking Oil

From a health perspective, most important is the content of its fats: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are emphasized. One should also consider an oil's smoke point, the temperature at which an oil begins to smoke and burn. Smoke points of oils typically range from 225 - 510 degrees Fahrenheit. When oil is overheated, its taste and nutritional value may be altered. When it starts to burn and smoke, it releases toxic free radicals into the food and toxic compounds into the air in the kitchen.

One should prefer organic oils and avoid dangerous, "partially hydrogenated" (trans) fats. Many inexpensive cooking oils are extracted from plants with industrial chemicals, prefer cold-pressed oil extracted mechanically from the plant or seed. Some oils are refined so they can better withstand heat, but refinement reduces nutritional value. Also, some experts recommend avoiding genetically modified oils (GMO-free).

The Healthiest Cooking Oils

Most cooking oils contain three types of fat, or at least two, but sometimes people classify them by the type they contain the most of. The following lists some recommended oils with their smoke points:

- **Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO)** - low smoke point of 375 degrees
The highest monounsaturated fatty acids of any oil,. "Extra virgin" means it's unrefined Refining loses antioxidants. EVOO is high in vitamins A, D, E, K, and beta-carotene.
- **Avocado Oil** - high smoke point of 520 degrees
Avocado oil is high in monounsaturated fat
- **Grape Seed Oil** - High smoke point 390 to 420 degrees
Organic grape seed oil is a healthy cooking oil, high in vitamin E and antioxidants. Cold-pressed or expeller-pressed is the best choice. Don't confuse it with rapeseed oil which is not a healthy option.
- **Flaxseed Oil** - very low smoke point of 225 degrees
Highest alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) omega-3 content of all oils, plus some fiber.
- **Sesame Oil** - low smoke point of 350 (unrefined) or 450 (refined) degrees
Made from sesame seeds; equal amounts of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats; extremely high in antioxidants but also higher omega-6, so use it in moderation.
- **Walnut Oil** - low smoke point is 320 degrees
Pressed from walnuts; High in the essential fatty acid ALA and an antioxidant called ellagic acid, Good source of B vitamins, vitamin E, selenium, iron, and calcium.
- **Coconut Oil** - low smoke point 350 (unrefined) and high 450 (refined) degrees.
92 percent saturated fat; Unlike olive oil, the terms "virgin" and "extra virgin" are not regulated and should be considered interchangeable.

When to Limit or Avoid a Cooking Oil

The arguments against using specific cooking oils are based largely on their fat profiles (monounsaturated fats are preferred over saturated fats and to some degree polyunsaturated fats) or too high in omega- 6 fatty acids. Additional arguments against some oils are the presence of genetically modified (GM) compounds and the potential for an oil to be contaminated with toxic solvents such as hexane during processing.

Cooking Oils to Limit or Avoid

- **Soybean Oil:** Too high in omega- 6 fatty acids; GMO likely
- **Corn Oil** - Too high in omega- 6 fatty acids; GMO likely; More than 50% of corn oil is polyunsaturated fat
- **Canola Oil** - Most canola oil is GMO extracted with hexane and may contain trans fats
- **Cottonseed Oil** can contain residue of fertilizers / pesticides; high in saturated fat and omega-6
- **Peanut Oil**- high in healthy monounsaturated fats, but also high in saturated fats and omega-6 fatty acids,
- **Palm Oil** - may have more grams of fat per serving than other oils (22 grams vs. 14 grams),
- **Crisco**- highly processed; high in saturated fat; should be avoided or consumed in very limited amounts

"Vegetable Oil" Products are sometimes simply labeled as "vegetable oil" and generally contain a mixture of different cheaper but **not recommended oils**, usually soybean, canola, corn, cottonseed and other oils that are high in omega-6 fatty acids. While it may be cheaper, avoid anything labeled only as "vegetable oil" because it is likely processed with toxic solvents like hexane and is not the healthiest .choice.

Points to Remember

The best cooking oils are fresh, organic, and cold-pressed. They are rich in omega-3 fatty acids and stand up to the level of heat you plan to use. Olive and avocado oils, with the most monounsaturated fat, are the most healthful choices. Sesame and walnut oil are also excellent choices for cooking. Flaxseed oil, which is high in omega-3 fatty acids, is a good option for low-temperature uses like salad dressing.

Coconut oil contains mostly saturated fat so its use should be limited. **MCT coconut oil** (**not** the commercial coconut oil mostly found in supermarkets, is made of 100% medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs) and may offer digestive advantages. **Stay clear of hydrogenated oils** (found in margarine and packaged foods) because they may contain trans fats. **Avoid soybean, corn, palm kernel, cottonseed, canola, and rapeseed oils** as they are extracted with chemical solvents (hexane) and may contain GM compounds.