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Your Guide to Healthy Cooking Oils

All oils are made up of three different types of fatty acids in varying proportions. The types are saturated, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Health experts have long advised people to choose oils low in saturated fat because it is linked to high cholesterol levels and cardiovascular disease.

Most common cooking oils are low in saturated fat, which is good news. (Palm oils and coconut oils are the high sat-fat exceptions.) Still, all oils are extremely concentrated in calories, so you'll want to use them carefully. It makes sense to use an oil that brings the most flavor to your dishes. Let's look at some of the best choices for your cooking.

Avocado oil. The current "it" oil with chefs and health enthusiasts, avocado oil has a buttery, warm flavor that works in savory and sweet recipes. Avocado oil is very high in monounsaturated fat. The oil has a very high smoke point so it's perfect for searing a piece of tuna or tofu. Avocado oil can be expensive.

Butter. Obviously, butter is not an oil, but it is used extensively in cooking, so we have included it here. Like lard and shortening, butter is solid at room temperature, a good indicator of its high saturated fat content. Health-minded cooks limit butter to a flavoring to be added (in small amounts) at the end of cooking. Ghee is butter that has been slowly simmered to evaporate the moisture content. It has a longer shelf life than butter and a higher smoke point so it can be used for sautéing.

Canola oil. Developed by Canadian plant breeders from the rapeseed plant, canola oil is prized for its very low saturated fat content. This bland oil is fine for cooking and salad dressings.

Nut oils. Almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts and other types of nut yield oils high in monounsaturated fat as well as the essential fatty acids that become linolenic and linoleic acid. Buy in small quantities and store in the fridge as nut oils become rancid more quickly than other oils. Use in small amounts in salad dressings.

Olive oil. A foundation of the Mediterranean diet since ancient times, olive oil has a high level of beneficial monounsaturated fat while being extremely low in saturated fat. Health benefits aside, it tastes delicious, especially in salads. The flavor, aroma and color of olive oils vary depending on the growing region. Extra virgin olive oil, sometimes listed in recipes as "EVOO," is considered the finest and fruitiest; it's also the priciest. Save it for adding flavor at the end of cooking. "Light" olive oil is a marketing term for mild-flavored oil — it is not any lighter in calories. Store olive oil in dark bottles in a cool place for up to 6 months.

QuickTakes



The Healthy Side of Fats

Fat in the American diet has taken a bad rap for a long time. It had been linked to heart disease, some cancers and weight gain. Fat's bad reputation has been softening somewhat in recent years.

Americans are no longer advised to monitor and restrict their percentage of calories from fat, for instance. Today's fat experts are finding health benefits connected to the consumption of some types of fat, including:

- People who consume foods rich in Omega-3 fats tend to have lower risk of chronic disease.
- Important roles in immune function, reproductive health and basic metabolism.
- Insulating and protecting internal organs.

This month's newsletter will help you choose the best cooking oils for your health and for your cooking preferences.

Enjoy!

Peanut oil. Prized by Chinese cooks for stir-frying because of its high smoke point, peanut oil is about 50% monounsaturated and 30% polyunsaturated fats. American peanut oil is light colored and neutral flavored; Chinese peanut oil tastes more like peanuts.

Safflower oil. Extracted from the seeds of the safflower, this colorless, flavorless oil has more polyunsaturated fats than any other oil. It doesn't solidify when chilled, making it good for salad dressings.

Sesame oil. Sesame oil comes in two basic types. One is light in color and has a delicate, nutty flavor. The other is a darker, toasted oil that is used to flavor certain Chinese specialties. Sesame oil is high in polyunsaturated fats.

Sunflower oil. Extracted from sunflower seeds, this pale yellow, nearly tasteless oil is high in polyunsaturated fat and low in saturated fat. It has a low smoke point so don't use it for sautéing.

Vegetable oil. Check out the ingredient list on a bottle of vegetable oil. It's likely that the first ingredient listed is soybean oil. Other ingredients might include cottonseed oil, corn oil, canola oil, peanut oil and others. Vegetable oil is the least expensive oil on the shelf.

Sources:

All About Oils. 7/26/16 <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/oils>

Accessed 1/5/2018

American Heart Association: Healthy Cooking Oils. 4/12/2016

<https://recipes.heart.org/Articles/1013/Healthy-Cooking-Oils> Accessed 1/5/2018

Beet, Red Onion and Walnut Salad with Bitter Greens Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- 3 medium beets (about ¾ pound)
- 1 medium red onion
- 1 ½ tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- A few drops pomegranate molasses, maple syrup or honey
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 12 ounces mixed bitter greens, such as escarole, endive, radicchio, baby kale or spinach, washed and torn
- ¼ cup walnut pieces
- 1 teaspoon walnut oil, for drizzling, optional

DIRECTIONS

1. Drop beets into boiling water and cook until they can be pierced with a knife, about 20 minutes. Drain and cover with cold water to cool to room temperature, about 30 minutes.
2. Peel the beets and slice into thin wedges. Place in a bowl. Thinly slice the red onion and add to the beets.
3. In a separate bowl, vigorously blend the olive oil, vinegar, mustard and a few drops of pomegranate molasses or other sweet syrup. Add salt and pepper to your taste. Pour over the beets and onions and toss to coat.
4. Arrange salad greens on four salad plates. Top with the beet/onion mixture. Distribute walnuts on top and drizzle very, very lightly with walnut oil.



NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

150 Calories
 7 g Fat
 2 g Saturated Fat
 4 g Protein
 17 g Carbohydrate
 3 g Fiber
 200 mg Sodium