

# The Truth About Coconut Oil

by Michael Babcock

There is widespread misconception that coconut oil is bad for you because it is said to raise blood cholesterol and cause heart disease. The only "proof" is one four-decades old study. The study used hydrogenated coconut oil.

It is now known that the process of hydrogenation creates "trans fatty acids" (TFAs), which are toxic entities that enter cell membranes, block utilization of essential fatty acids (EFAs) and impede cell functionality. Trans fatty acids also cause a rise in blood cholesterol. These substances are not present in natural coconut oil.

In other words, a study based on hydrogenated coconut oil has no relevance to the non-hydrogenated coconut milk or coconut oil that you eat.

Widespread studies of coconut-consuming populations such as those found in Polynesia and Sri Lanka, show that "dietary coconut oil does not lead to high serum cholesterol nor to high coronary heart disease mortality or morbidity." ([See endnote 1.](#)) Other studies show no change in serum cholesterol level from coconut oil. ([See endnote 2.](#)) And if it is true that the herpes virus and cytomegalovirus have a causative role in the initial formation of atherosclerotic plaques ([See endnote 3.](#)), coconut oil may be beneficial in preventing heart disease. ([See Benefits](#) below.)

For further reading: Mary G. Enig, [Coconut: In Support of Good Health in the 21st Century](#) (offsite).

## Coconut Oil as Saturated Fat

Another reason people believe coconut oil must be bad for you is misguided association: it is a saturated fat and "saturated fats are bad for you." Dietary guidelines inevitably fail to distinguish between different kinds of saturated fats and insist that saturated fats (meaning all saturated fats) are harmful.

This is not just misleading. It is bad science. Leading scientists now recognize that just as there is good cholesterol, there are also good saturated fats.

Fats are classified as short-, medium- or long-chain based on the number of carbon molecules they contain. Nearly two-thirds of the saturated fat in coconut oil consists of medium-chain fatty acids.

When we eat long-chain fatty acids, they must be emulsified by bile salts in the small intestine before they can be absorbed into our body. Short- and medium-chain fatty acids, such as those

in coconut milk, are absorbed directly through the portal vein to the liver, where they are immediately available to the body.

In other words, most of the saturated fat in coconut oil is easily digestible and converted into quick energy. And these types of fatty acids are less likely to cause obesity because they are immediately used by the body and have no opportunity to be stored.

## Benefits of Coconut Oil



Nearly 50% of the fatty acid in natural coconut oil is lauric acid, which converts to the fatty acid monolaurin in the body. Lauric acid has adverse effects on a variety of microorganisms including bacteria, yeast, fungi, and enveloped viruses. It destroys the lipid membrane of such enveloped viruses as HIV, measles, Herpes simplex virus (HSV-1), influenza and cytomegalovirus (CMV). Its usefulness in treating AIDS is currently under investigation. It is a main component of human breast milk and helps protect children from illness during infancy.

Capric acid, which comprises another 7% of coconut oil fat content, also stimulates anti-microbial activity.

In other words: not only does coconut oil not cause heart problems, it is good for you. To quote Dr. Mary Enig: "The research over four decades concerning coconut oil in the diet and heart disease is quite clear: coconut oil has been shown to be beneficial." ([See endnote 4.](#))

Coconut oil is a "functional food," defined as a food that "provides a health benefit over and beyond the basic nutrients." ([See endnote 5.](#)) It is an immune-system enhancer.

For further reading: Mary G. Enig, [Coconut: In Support of Good Health in the 21st Century](#) (offsite). Also the [Center for Research on Lauric Oils, Inc](#) (offsite).

## TFAs – The Real Cause for Concern

In fact, the real problem fats in our diets are the trans fatty acids, mentioned above as a by-product of hydrogenating fats. Here are just a few of their adverse effects: lower the "good" HDL cholesterol and raise the "bad" LDL cholesterol while raising total serum cholesterol levels; increase blood insulin levels in humans in response to glucose load, increasing risk for diabetes; affect immune response by lowering efficiency of B cell response and increasing proliferation of T cells; interfere with utilization of essential omega-3 fatty acids; and escalate adverse effects of essential fatty acid deficiency.

You get these effects, and more, every time you consume hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oil, which is present in most processed food, including margarine, potato chips, baked goods, etc.

For Further Reading: [Interview of Mary Enig](#) (offsite).

## Why are We Misinformed?

In one word: economics. Beginning with a flawed study four decades ago, continuing through the 1950s, intensifying in the 1980s, and again in the 1990s, the misinformation about coconut oil has been promulgated by such economically motivated organizations as the American Soybean Association (ASA), the Corn Products Company (CPC International) and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). They are aided by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), many of whose key personnel are recruited from and return to the vegetable oil industry. Previously, coconut oil was widely used in baked goods and fried goods until their publicity campaigns, based on erroneous information, totally discredited coconut oil and caused its nearly complete elimination from the American diet.

Finally, after years of denial, The FDA and CSPI are finally talking about the harmful effects of trans fatty acids, evidence of which has been accumulating since the 1950s. Nonetheless, they continue to disparage coconut oil and take no effective action to limit TFAs, which already have been banned in some European countries. TFAs will finally be listed on food labels, starting in 2006 — why has it taken them so long! TFA dangers have been known for decades and continue to cause disease! News items coming from the USDA and FDA still lump TFAs with saturated fats, which are natural and do contain nutrients vital for our bodies. The current FDA Consumer's Guide to Fats was last updated in 1999 and consistently warns against (all) saturated fats, while failing to mention any harmful effects of trans fatty acids.

How effective is this brainwashing? Many of you will not believe the facts on these pages and will continue to avoid coconut oil and coconut milk out of health concerns. Despite the proven benefits. We invite you to investigate further.

For Further reading: Mary Enig and Sally Fallon, [The Oiling of America](#) (offsite).

## For Further Reading . . .

- [Links to articles on this site](#)
- [Links to offsite articles](#)
- Offsite: [Coconut-Info.com page of research links](#).

## Endnotes



1. Kaunitz H, Dayrit CS. Coconut oil consumption and coronary heart disease. *Philippine Journal of Internal Medicine* 1992;30:165-171. Prior IA, Davidson F, Salmond CE, Czochanska Z. Cholesterol, coconuts, and diet on Polynesian atolls: a natural experiment: the Pukapuka and Tokelau Island studies. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 1981;34:1552-1561.
2. Kurup PA, Rajmohan T. II. Consumption of coconut oil and coconut kernel and the incidence of atherosclerosis. *Coconut and Coconut Oil in Human Nutrition, Proceedings. Symposium on Coconut and Coconut Oil in Human Nutrition. 27 March 1994. Coconut Development Board, Kochi, India, 1995, pp 35-59*
3. *New York Times, Medical Science, Tuesday, January 29, 1991. Common virus seen as having early role in arteries' clogging (byline Sandra Blakeslee).*
4. [Coconut: In Support of good Health in the 21st Century](#), by Mary G. Enig, Ph.D., F.A.C.N.
5. <http://www.lauric.org/functional.html>

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