

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 coronary heart disease. ([See endnote 1.](#)) Other studies show no change in cholesterol levels from coconut oil. ([See endnote 2.](#)) And if it is true that the viruses 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.)

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.

Leading scientists now recognise that just as there is good cholesterol, there are also good saturated fats. Nearly two-thirds of the saturated fat in coconut oil consists of medium-chain fatty acids. 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

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.](#))

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

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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