

# Health Tips About Oil: Pros and Cons

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There is a lot of confusing information circulating about oils. Hopefully, the tips below will help you navigate your way to the good oils that will benefit your health in the long run.

## The Lowdown on Oil

Oils that originate from vegetable, nut, and seed sources provide the essential fatty acids that are critical for our nerve and brain functions. The typical vegetable oils that can be found at supermarkets have undergone chemical and heat processing that destroy the quality of the oil — bleaching, cooking, defoaming, distillation, extraction, refining, and the addition of preservatives. Additionally, many of these oils are exposed to light and air and are even potentially filled with pesticides.

All of this causes the formation of free radicals, which undermine the health benefits of consuming essential fatty acids. To ensure that you are receiving all of the possible benefits from your oil, buy organic, cold-pressed, minimally processed oils at your local health food store. Be sure that you consume oil within three months; to prevent it from becoming rancid, store your oil in the refrigerator in dark glass containers.

## Fats: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

There are three types of fat: monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, and saturated.

Monounsaturated fats — including olive oil, sesame oil, canola oil, almond oil, flax oil, and fish oil — are good fats. These contain essential fatty acids such as omega-3 and gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) that are critical in brain development and function, skin health, vascular health, proper immune function, fertility, and normal physical development.

Polyunsaturated fats, such as margarine, corn oil, hydrogenated safflower oil, and sunflower oil, also contain essential fatty acids. Unfortunately, these fats are highly refined and contain large amounts of trans fat. Trans fat, created by hydrogenating vegetable oil to make it spreadable, is implicated in both cancer and heart disease.

Saturated fats are the bad kind of fat. Included in this category is butter, peanut oil, coconut oil, palm kernel oil, and lard. These saturated fats elevate cholesterol and triglyceride levels, leading to an increased chance of heart attack and stroke. These oils are best avoided.

## Two Stand-Out Oils

The essential ingredient of the Mediterranean diet, **olive oil**, has been found to have beneficial effects on blood lipids and it may even lower blood pressure. According to the World Health Organization, nearly 60 percent of strokes and 50 percent of heart disease are associated with high blood pressure.

Hypertension is estimated to be the cause of 7.1 million deaths per year worldwide. A recent study has concluded that olive oil intake is “inversely associated with both systolic and diastolic blood pressure.” The bottom line: consuming more olive oil is linked to lowered blood pressure.

**Sesame oil** — the most common oil consumed by Chinese centenarians — is enjoyed for its delicious nutty flavor and also possesses some considerable therapeutic properties. Chinese medicine lists sesame as a blood builder, a kidney and liver tonic, and a bowel protector and regulator. It is rich in phytic acid, the antioxidant that may prevent cancer. Lignan sesamin, one variety of sesame oil, appeared to radically reduce cholesterol levels in the bloodstream and liver of rats.

To benefit your health and enhance your meals, add some olive oil to your food and salads; sprinkle sesame seeds and oil into your dishes regularly. Some other excellent choices for oils include: walnut oil, flaxseed oil, and soy oil.

I hope I have cleared up some of the confusion surrounding oil. I invite you to visit often and share your own personal health and longevity tips with me.

May you live long, live strong, and live happy!

Dr. Mao