

Olive oil's health benefits

The greatest exponent of monounsaturated fat is olive oil, and it is a prime component of the Mediterranean Diet. Olive oil is a natural juice which preserves the taste, aroma, vitamins and properties of the olive fruit. Olive oil is the only vegetable oil that can be consumed as it is - freshly pressed from the fruit.



The beneficial health effects of olive oil are due to both its high content of monounsaturated [fatty acids](#) and its high content of antioxidative substances. Studies have shown that olive oil offers protection against [heart disease](#) by controlling LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels while raising HDL (the "good" cholesterol) levels. (1-3) No other naturally produced oil has as large an amount of monounsaturated as olive oil -mainly oleic acid.

Olive oil is very well tolerated by the stomach. In fact, olive oil's protective function has a beneficial effect on ulcers and gastritis. Olive oil activates the secretion of bile and pancreatic hormones much more naturally than [prescribed drugs](#). Consequently, it lowers the incidence of [gallstone formation](#).

Olive oil and heart disease

Studies have shown that people who consumed 25 milliliters (mL) - about 2 tablespoons - of virgin olive oil daily for 1 week showed less oxidation of LDL cholesterol and higher levels of antioxidant compounds, particularly phenols, in the blood.(4)

But while all types of olive oil are sources of monounsaturated fat, EXTRA VIRGIN olive oil, from the first pressing of the olives, contains higher levels of antioxidants, particularly [vitamin E](#) and phenols, because it is less processed.

Olive oil is clearly one of the good oils, one of the [healing fats](#). Most people do quite well with it since it does not upset the critical omega 6 to omega 3 ratio and most of the fatty acids in olive oil are actually an omega-9 oil which is monounsaturated.

Olive oil and colon cancer

Spanish researchers suggest that including olive oil in your diet may also offer benefits in terms of [colon cancer](#) prevention (5). Their study results showed that rats fed diet supplemented with olive oil had a lower risk of colon cancer than those fed safflower oil-supplemented diets. In fact, the rats that received olive oil had colon cancer rates almost as low as those fed [fish oil](#), which several studies have already linked to a reduction in colon cancer risk.



Types of olive oil

Generally, olive oil is extracted by pressing or crushing olives. Olive oil comes in different varieties, depending on the amount of processing involved. Varieties include:

Extra virgin - considered the best, least processed, comprising the oil from the first pressing of the olives.

Virgin - from the second pressing.

Pure - undergoes some processing, such as filtering and refining.

Extra light - undergoes considerable processing and only retains a very mild olive flavour.

When buying olive oil you will want to obtain a high quality EXTRA VIRGIN oil. The oil that comes from the first "pressing" of the olive, is extracted without using heat (a cold press) or chemicals, and has no "off" flavors is awarded "extra virgin" status. The less the olive oil is handled, the closer to its natural state, the better the oil. If the olive oil meets all the criteria, it can be designated as "extra virgin".

What is pure and light olive oil? "Pure" olive oil is made by adding a little extra virgin olive oil to refined olive oil. It is a lesser grade oil that is also labeled as just "olive oil" in the U.S.

"Light" olive oil is a marketing concept and not a classification of olive oil grades. It is completely unregulated by any certification organizations and therefore has no real precedent to what its content should be. Sometimes, the olive oil is cut with other vegetable oils.

How to care for your olive oil

Resist the temptation to place your beautiful bottle of olive oil on the windowsill. Light and heat are the #1 enemy of oil. Keep olive oil in a cool and dark place, tightly sealed. Oxygen promotes rancidity. Olive oil is like other oils and can easily go rancid when exposed to air, light or high temperatures.

You can of course buy extra virgin olive oil in any grocery store. A good source on the internet for extra virgin olive oil is [here](#).

Olive oil versus canola oil

Do not fall into the hype which is put out by traditional medicine regarding the promotion of canola oil (rapeseed) as superior due to its concentration of monounsaturated fatty acids. Olive oil is far superior and has been around for thousands of years. Canola oil is a relatively recent development and the original crops were unfit for human consumption due to their high content of a dangerous fatty acid called erucic acid.

If the taste of olive oil is a problem, or if you are frying or sautéing food, then you should consider [coconut oil](#). Many nutritionally misinformed people would consider this unwise due to coconut oil's nearly exclusive content of saturated fat. However, this is just not the case. Because it has mostly saturated fat, it is much less dangerous to heat. The heat will not tend to cause the oil to transition into dangerous [trans fatty acids](#).