Patient Information

Health Benefits Of Oils

When following a healthy diet, remember that some fats — in moderation — can be good for you. Fats and oils are made up of fatty acids. There are four types of fatty acids: saturated fatty acids, trans fatty acids, monounsaturated fatty acids and polyunsaturated fatty acids.

You should decrease the amounts of saturated and trans fatty acids in your diet, since they may raise your cholesterol and put you at higher risk for heart disease. On the other hand, eating foods high in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids may actually help lower LDL or “bad” cholesterol.

Oils are a good source of monounsaturated fat, but you must choose them wisely. Replace oils in your diet that are high in bad fats with oils that are high in the better fats.

For example, you could replace corn oil, which is higher in saturated fat, with olive oil, which has a high content of monounsaturated fatty acids.

Olive Oil’s Benefits

Olive oil’s high content of monounsaturated fatty acids protects against heart disease by controlling LDL cholesterol levels while raising HDL or “good” cholesterol levels. In fact, olive oil has the highest amount of monounsaturated fatty acids of all naturally produced oils.

The protective function of olive oil, which is well tolerated by the stomach, may have a beneficial effect on ulcers. Other research suggests that some compounds in olive oil may help prevent colon cancer.

Adding Olive Oil to Your Diet

Olive oil is extracted by pressing or crushing olives, and depending on how the oil was made, it may have very different properties than other types.

Extra virgin olive oil comes from the first pressing of the olives and is considered the best and least processed. Virgin olive oil is from the second pressing of olives. Other varieties of olive oil include pure and extra light versions, which are more processed.

Replace olive oil in dishes that typically use another oil, such as in sauces, salad dressings and sautéed dishes. Also, store olive oil and any other oils in a cool, dark place. The oil can go bad in the presence of heat and light. Remember to use your oil within 6 months after you buy it, or by the “sell-by” date.

Flaxseed Oil

Flaxseeds are the richest plant source of omega-3 fatty acids, so flaxseed oil also contains plenty of these acids. Flaxseed oil also is a source of omega-6 fatty acids. Both of these fats are polyunsaturated and are important for normal growth and development.

One omega-3 fatty acid in flaxseed oil is alpha-linolenic acid, which is now being researched for its potential to reduce conditions such as stroke, certain cancers and skin ailments. Flaxseed oil is also a good source of protein, potassium and beta-carotene.

This oil does not stand up well in heat, so it should be stored in the refrigerator and be used in salad dressings, rather than for cooking.

Nut Oils

Like the nuts they come from, nut oils are very low in saturated fats. Nut oils have other benefits:

- Almond, hazelnut, macadamia, pecan and pistachio oils are high in monounsaturated fats.
- Walnut oil is high in polyunsaturated fats and also supplies omega-3 fatty acids.
- Almond and hazelnut oils are a significant source of vitamin E.

Nut oils can be added to your diet in various ways. For example, drizzle almond oil over vegetables, use hazelnut oil in baked goods, add pistachio oil to salad dressing, or use peanut oil for stir-fry dishes.