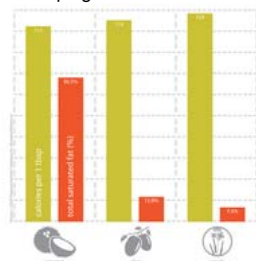


*DIVISION OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
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Easy on the coconut oil

STILLWATER, Okla. – These days, it seems like coconut oil is soaking up credit for its positive affect on a wide range of health conditions. But, still developing science around the popular oil tells a little different story.



“We know all saturated fats are not created equally, but there’s no evidence that coconut oil is better or healthier than other vegetable oils,” said Janice Hermann, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension nutrition specialist.

A tablespoon of coconut oil has 117 calories and is 86 percent saturated fat, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Nutrient Database. By comparison, the same amount of canola oil contains 124 calories and is 7 percent saturated fat.

Plant based oils, including virgin coconut oil, provide some antioxidant properties which can offer some health benefits.

Coconut oil is made up mostly of medium-chain fatty acids (60 percent). Though researchers know the body treats these shorter chains differently from longer ones, they are not yet sure of the link between these medium-chain fatty acids and heart disease.

There is evidence coconut oil can raise both HDL (good) cholesterol and LDL (bad) cholesterol.

The bottom line? Use coconut oil, if you prefer, but treat it like any other saturated fat.

That means limiting your intake to 10 percent or less of daily calories in order to cut the risk of heart disease, according to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

“If you do use coconut oil, look carefully at how fits in your overall diet and think about what fat it will replace,” Hermann said. “For example, you could swap virgin coconut oil for butter. But, exchanging coconut oil for canola oil makes less sense because canola oil is lower in saturated fat.”

Also, virgin coconut oil is a healthier option compared to partially hydrogenated coconut oil, which contains trans fats.

“So far, the research shows coconut oil could have some health benefits, it isn’t some kind of magic bullet, either,” Hermann said. “Until we learn more about it, it’s best to use it in moderation just like other fats in your diet.”

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