

Food Trend Chronicles: Coconut Oil

Health gurus, tv doctors, and tons of blogs have all been abuzz with a new health food trend, rhapsodizing about the wonders of coconut oil. But is all this hype actually merited? After all, wasn't coconut oil once touted as the evil ingredient in movie popcorn? What has changed? Anything?

Just the Facts, Ma'am, Just the Facts

Let's take a look at the science first. Studies have been done to see whether coconut oil could be a tool that would help people lose weight, repair brain damage caused by Alzheimer's disease, and reduce their cholesterol levels, therefore reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease. Unfortunately, not one peer-reviewed study proved that coconut oil could live up to its reputation as a panacea for all that ails us.

Coconut Oil: What's In It?

Coconut oil is mostly saturated fat – 92% saturated fat to be exact. Saturated fat is the main culprit when you're looking for what produced the high blood cholesterol levels in the American diet. For comparison, 63% of the fat in butter is saturated. As far as the scientific community is concerned, not much has changed. Coconut oil does contain medium-chained fatty acids (MCTs), which are known to be easily digestible and not cause the same damage to the cardiovascular system as short and long-chained fatty acids. That said, coconut oil is not 100% MCT oil, a fact that the medical media folks have left out. The truth is that it may actually only contain 10% MCTs. And while MCT oil may increase HDL (good) cholesterol, it also raises LDL (bad) cholesterol at the same time, and any



food that raises LDL should not be consumed in abundance.

Coconut Oil: When To Try It

Using coconut oil in cooking and baking is a good alternative for vegans and bakers who are looking for a substitute for lard or other solid vegetable oils; it has a mild, sweet flavor and is solid at room temperature. **But don't be fooled by the hype: Replacing all of the fat in your diet with coconut oil will not benefit your brain, heart, or waistline.** The guideline still stands at keeping fat intake to 30% of your diet, and saturated fat to less than 7% of your total daily calories in order to keep your heart healthy. Variety is also key: There is no one "super food" with the ability to protect our bodies from disease. And in the case of coconut oil, the scientific fact remains that it should be consumed in small amounts on occasion, and not thought of as the wonder food to be eaten at every meal.

By Beth Rosen, MS.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY: