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Heart-Healthy Cooking: Oils 101



Keep this primer as a ready reference

By The Beating Edge Team | 5/31/12 6:00 a.m.

Confused about which oils are heart-healthy and which aren't? If so, you're not alone. Keep this cooking-with-oils primer with your favorite recipes or hang inside a cupboard door as a ready reference.

Heart-healthy fats are derived primarily from plant oils, so the following cooking primer relates to oils only. But, like fats, not all oils are created equal. A single oil cannot be used for all your cooking. Instead, fill your pantry with a variety, says Melissa Ohlson, MS, RD, LD, [[LINK: http://www.clevelandclinic.org/displayPhysician?fileid=692761&physicianId=18627](http://www.clevelandclinic.org/displayPhysician?fileid=692761&physicianId=18627)] a registered dietitian with Cleveland Clinic's Preventive Cardiology and Rehabilitation Program.

Know the smoke point

Because of their chemical makeup, some oils are better suited for lower-heat cooking than others. This is important because heating oil above its smoke point — the temperature at which the oil begins to smoke — produces toxic fumes and harmful free radicals (the stuff we're trying to prevent in the first place). A good rule of thumb: The more refined the oil, the higher its smoke point.

High smoke point

Best suited for searing, browning and deep frying (although the latter is not a recommended practice where heart health is concerned).

Oil	% Mono	% Poly	% Sat	Nutrition Notes
Almond	65	28	7	Distinctive nutty flavor
Avocado	65	18	17	Sweet aroma
Hazelnut	82	11	7	Bold, strong flavor
Palm	38	10	52	High in saturated fat. Not recommended
Sunflower	79	7	14	Seek out high-oleic versions, which are higher in monounsaturated fat
"Light" olive/refined olive	78	8	14	The more refined the olive oil, the better its all-purpose cooking use. "Light" refers to color

Medium-high smoke point

Best suited for baking, oven cooking or stir frying.

Oil	% Mono	% Poly	% Sat	Nutrition Notes
Canola	62	31	7	Contains low levels of omega-3
Grapeseed	17	73	10	High in omega-6
Macadamia nut	84	3	13	Bold flavor
Extra virgin olive	78	8	14	Best-pick oil
Peanut	48	34	18	Great for stir frying

Medium smoke point

Best suited for light sautéing, sauces and low-heat baking.

Oil	% Mono	% Poly	% Sat	Nutrition Notes
Corn	25	62	13	High in omega-6. High-oleic (monounsaturated fat) versions coming soon
Hemp	15	75	10	Good source of omega-3. Keep refrigerated
Pumpkinseed	32	53	15	Contains omega-3
Sesame	41	44	15	Rich, nutty flavor. Keep refrigerated
Soybean	25	60	15	High in omega-6
Walnut	24	67	9	Good source of omega-3
Coconut	6	2	92	High in saturated fat. Not recommended

No-heat oils*

Best used for dressings, dips or marinades.

Oil	% Mono	% Poly	% Sat	Nutrition Notes
Flaxseed	65	28	7	Excellent source of alpha-linolenic acid, a form of omega-3
Wheat Germ	65	18	17	Rich in omega-6. Keep refrigerated

**Toasted sesame, extra virgin olive and walnut oils also work well.*

Portion control

Choosing the right fat and the right cooking method for that fat are important, but so is proper portion control. Too much of a good thing may not be healthy, so always make sure you include healthy unsaturated fats as a part of a diet rich in plant foods — fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds and whole grains — and low in animal fats.

For an appointment with Cleveland Clinic's Preventive Cardiology and Rehabilitation program, please call **800.890.2467**. Or try Cleveland Clinic's remote Nutrition Counseling service [*LINK: <http://clevelandclinic.org/BeWellNutrition>*] . Happy cooking!

Fats at a glance

Remember the following strategies when it comes to cooking with fats:

Saturated fats – Bottom line: the fewer the better. Less than 7 percent of your daily fat calories should come from saturated fats. Eliminate whole and 2 percent dairy, and limit red meat and other animal protein at meals (reduce frequency, portion size or both).

Trans fats – Eliminate from your diet by avoiding foods that contain hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils. (Read the ingredient list!) Shortening and stick margarine contain trans fat.

Monounsaturated fats – Ramp up your intake of olives, avocados and nuts, and use olive and canola oils for most of your cooking and baking, respectively.

Polyunsaturated fats – You're likely already getting enough omega-6, so focus on increasing your intake of omega-3 foods such as salmon and walnuts.

We welcome your comments. However, we cannot provide a medical opinion without an in-person consultation. To learn about Cleveland Clinic services available to you, please fill out our WebMail form.