**Crazy for Coconut Oil**

1. **What is Coconut Oil?**

Coconut products are flooding the market – first there was coconut water, now there's coconut oil, milk, yogurt, kefir and ice cream.  Don’t forget about shredded coconut! This decadent nut used to be considered a major nutritional no-no due to its saturated fat content, but is now being touted as a healthy food choice.

* 1. The coconut palm starts fruiting 6 - 10 years after the seed germinates and reaches full production at 15 - 20 years of age. The tree continues to fruit until it is about 80 years old, with an annual production of 50 - 200 fruits per tree, depending on climate. The fruits require about a year to develop and are generally produced regularly throughout the year.
  2. Coconut oil is an edible oil extracted from the kernel or meat of mature coconuts.
  3. It is used in food and cosmetics. Coconut oil can be used in various ways at home - such as cooking and baking and moisturizing skin and hair……Wow we can cook with it and bathe in it.
  4. Some coconut oil products are referred to as “virgin” coconut oil. The term has come to mean that the oil is generally unprocessed. For example, virgin coconut oil usually has not been bleached, deodorized, or refined as some commercial coconut oils are.
  5. Some coconut oil products claim to be “cold pressed” coconut oil. This generally means that a mechanical method of pressing out the oil is used, but without the use of any outside heat source. Virgin cold pressed coconut oil is considered the most nutritious because it is the least processed.
  6. Coconut oil is one of the richest sources of saturated fat. Almost 90% of the fatty acid in coconut oil is saturated. Saturated fats have long been viewed as the unhealthy fats; however, research shows the form of saturated fat in coconut oil is different from the one found in cheese or steak, and is considered to have unique health benefits. These fatty acids are called medium-chained fatty acids and are metabolized much easier in the body compared to long-chained fatty acids found in unhealthier versions of saturated fats.

1. **History of Coconut Oil**
   1. In many tropical countries coconut oil has been a diet staple for over 4000 years. In its natural unaltered form this staple has been used as medicine and food by diverse groups around the globe.
   2. After World War II coconut oil was sold as “margarine” in England and “coconut butter” in the United States.
   3. Coconut oil was the world’s leading vegetable oil until soybean oil took over in the 1960’s.
   4. Nowadays, coconut oil is making a comeback as it is being promoted in the market as a healthier fat choice.
2. **Health Benefits**

We are hearing a lot about the health benefits of coconut oil. Is this tropical treat really all it’s cracked up to be?

* 1. Fat is an important component of the diet:
     1. It is used for making many hormones
     2. It protects our nerves and internal organs as a thermal covering
     3. It is essential for growth
     4. Some fatty acids are essential, we must get them from the diet, and they are used to make important compounds that are used for growth and metabolism
     5. It is used for energy in the body
  2. Coconut oil contains antioxidants such as vitamin E
  3. Because coconut oil has a lot of medium-chain fatty acids it can be useful for malabsorption conditions
  4. May have some antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal properties
  5. May help support the immune system.
  6. Coconut oil fat is easier for the body to metabolize. Perhaps the greatest advantage of coconut oil is that it goes directly to the liver where it is metabolized like a carbohydrate and gets converted into energy, not like the other oils which get stored as fat in the body when too much is consumed.
  7. Coconut oil may be beneficial to increase the good cholesterol in the body (HDL), which can lower the risk of heart problems.
  8. Coconut oil has the same calories as other oil, but is a healthier choice than other saturated fats, animal fats and trans fats.
  9. In ancient India, the coconut palm has been recognized as a top immune booster, antifungal, antibiotic, antiviral and antibacterial remedy for thousands of years.
  10. It can provide quick energy
  11. Some feel it may improve memory, lots of research continuing in this area
  12. It may help you feel full, assisting with weight loss of weight maintenance
  13. Applying coconut oil to the skin twice daily can improve skin moisture in people with dry skin

1. **Selection, Storage, and Preparation**
   1. Selection: Organic coconut oil will guarantee it to be free of solvents and chemicals found in some commercial coconut oils. Buy coconut oil that is labeled unrefined and cold pressed. “Unrefined” means it has not been hydrogenated, bleached or deodorized. Virgin organic oil would be a great choice. You can purchase a jar of coconut oil at most grocery stores now, typically located near other cooking oils.
   2. Storage: Coconut oil is a very stable oil. Because of its high saturated fat content, it is slow to oxidize, lasting up to six months at 75 °F without spoiling, so no need to refrigerate! Generally coconut oil will be liquid at or above 75F. It is generally solid when stored 75F.
   3. Preparation/Uses:
      1. Add coconut oil directly into food in any recipe. May substitute coconut oil for equal amounts of any other vegetable oil. Easiest to use in baking at liquid form/room temperature.
      2. Unlike many other cooking oils, coconut oil is very stable and can withstand high cooking temperatures (thanks to its high constitution of saturated fats). The smoking point of coconut oil is about 350°F, so it’s perfectly suitable for sautéing, baking, roasting, and even frying.
      3. Pop popcorn in coconut oil or drizzle over popcorn instead of butter
      4. Stir-fry veggies or pan fry fish or chicken
      5. Use in baked goods, breads or waffles/pancakes
2. **Fun Facts:** 
   1. Coconut is the largest seed in the world. The coconut is the most extensively grown and used nut in the world and the most important palm. It is an important commercial crop in many tropical countries, contributing significantly to their economies.
   2. Some people choose to purely eat 1-2 tsp coconut oil daily for health benefits.
   3. Coconuts are a prehistoric plant that scientists believe came from the South Pacific around what is now New Guinea.
   4. The sailors aboard Vasco de Gama’s ships gave the coconut its name.  They called it “Coco”, named after a grimacing face or hobgoblin. When the “coco” came to England, the suffix of nut was added.
   5. The coconut industry is one of the most important industries in the Philippines. It is the industry that provides livelihood for almost one-third (1/3) of the Philippine population.
   6. Baby Tip: Coconut oil is a fantastic barrier to be used with cloth diapers! It is natural, great for baby skin with antifungal properties, and washes out of the diapers easily! Tested and approved by the nutrition manager.

Coconut oil can be a healthier fat to choose when planning recipes. At this time, neither the American Heart Association or the Dietary Guidelines suggest that coconut oil is any better or preferable over other saturated fats, however, most experts agree there may be some nutritional benefits. Despite emerging research, the recommendation is still to limit your total saturated fat intake. As research continues to be available, we will have more knowledge about this healthy fat. Healthy fats in your diet are essential to healthy living. Virgin coconut oil is rich in medium-chain fatty acids that are quickly absorbed into the body for energy. This naturally saturated, but not hydrogenated, fat is getting renewed attention among researchers as it becomes clear that saturated fats have many vital roles to play in our bodies. When able, it may be healthier to use coconut oil in place of other fats in your diet.