

DR. CHRISTOPHER'S *Herbal Legacy Newsletter*

August 21, 2013

Coconut oil -Michelle Knuteson MH

Coconut oil, once shunned as being unhealthy because it is high in saturated fats, is now considered by many as a magical health food. The difference between coconut oil and other saturated fats is in the size of the fat molecules. Long chain fats are hard to digest, and pass directly into the lymphatic system. The fats in coconut oil are medium chain fatty acids



(MCFA's). These MCFA's are quickly digested, even without the aid of pancreatic enzymes, and are transported via the hepatic portal vein to the liver. MCFA's never enter the lymphatic system or bloodstream, so they don't clog arteries like their longer chained relatives. Instead, they are light, easy to digest, and quickly converted to energy. Coconut oil actually lowers cholesterol and improves fat metabolism.

Most commercial grade coconut oils are made from dried copra (meat of the coconut) and go through an extensive refining process to extract the oil. Virgin coconut oil is made from the fresh meat and the oil is extracted either through a quick drying method, using minimal heat and then mechanically pressed or it goes through a process called wet-milling where the meat is not dried. Instead the "coconut milk" is expressed first, and then the oil is further expressed from the water either through the method of boiling, fermentation, refrigeration or a mechanical centrifuge. Some retailers and manufacturers will call their oil "Extra Virgin Coconut Oil" but there is no other processing method then what is listed, so there is no official classification or difference between "virgin" and "extra virgin" like there is in the olive oil industry.

There are false claims of coconut oil being raw and full of enzymes, all coconut oil has "seen heat". For one thing coconuts are native to the tropics where temperatures are very hot, so shipping alone will expose the oil to higher temperatures and some heat needs to be applied in

the processing to ensure that no moisture is present in the oil that may cause deterioration. Virgin oil uses minimal heat in the processing methods.

The good thing about coconut oil is that it isn't damaged by heat. That's why it is so good for cooking. It's the saturation that makes it stable. If coconut oil contained enzymes it would become very perishable-just like all raw foods containing enzymes ~ Lita Lee Ph.D.

Cooking with coconut oil does not introduce hydrogen into the oil or hydrogenate it. Hydrogenation is an industrial process to make an oil turn solid at room temperatures which creates harmful Trans fatty acids. Coconut oil is naturally very stable oil.

To purchase a healthy coconut oil, one must determine between "virgin" and "refined" oil. Virgin oil, healthier oil, is made from the fresh meat therefore it will have a distinct aroma and the taste of coconut will be present. Tasteless coconut oil is more than likely refined and made from copra (dried meat). Buying organic virgin coconut oil may help to insure that there has been no pesticides or fertilization used on the crop. Buying "expeller-pressed" oil usually means that the oil was extracted by "physical refining" rather than a chemical extraction using a solvent.

The health benefits from using coconut oil claim to be many and come mainly from the MCFAs. Coconut is a food so therefore the oil is very safe for consumption in adults, pregnant women, children, and pets. An adult should consume about 3.5 tablespoons of coconut oil throughout a day to receive the best benefit and taken with foods high in fiber and protein.

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