

Oils: Choosing the Right One

With so many oils to choose from, which one is the best for what you are preparing?

Olive oil

Olive oil is a versatile oil that is used in dressings, marinades, sauces, pasta, stir-fries, soups, and meat dishes. Olive oil contains more monounsaturated fats and antioxidants than any other oil. The polyphenols in olive oil contain anti-inflammatory and anticlotting properties. Olive oil is believed to decrease the risks of heart disease and cancer.

Extra virgin olive oil contains more antioxidants than other varieties. Virgin olive oil and extra virgin olive oil are best used on cool dishes, while other varieties are good for cooking and even baking, especially in recipes that contain many spices or chocolate.

Olive oil contains:

- 77% monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFA)
- 9% polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA)
- 14% saturated fatty acids (SFA)

Avocado oil

This oil imparts a buttery, nutty flavor to the food that it is added to. Avocado oil is excellent in dressings and marinades, and stands up to heat well, with a smoke point of 520° F.

Avocado oil contains:

- 70% MUFA
- 10% PUFA
- 20% SFA

Canola oil

Canola oil is best used in dishes with a mild flavor. It is an all-purpose oil overall, with applications in frying and general cooking. Canola oil is cholesterol free, contains the lowest amount of saturated fat of any oil, and contains a high percentage of monounsaturated fatty acids. Used sparingly, canola oil may decrease the risk of coronary heart disease. Refined canola oil has a smoke point of 400° F.

Canola oil contains:

- 62% MUFA
- 32% PUFA
- 6% SFA

Grape seed oil

This oil carries a light, slightly tart taste. It is used for baking, grilling, frying, and preparing salad dressings. Grape seed oil does not withstand high levels of heat and has a smoke point of 320° F. It is likely that the antioxidant level of grape seed oil aids in the prevention of stroke and coronary disease. It is believed that grape seed oil is equivalent to olive oil in its heart-healthy properties.

Grape seed oil contains:

- 17% MUFA
- 71% PUFA
- 12% SFA

Walnut oil

Walnut oil becomes rancid quickly, and refrigerator storage is required. It contains magnesium, potassium, and vitamin E. Walnut oil is not especially good for cooking, but is useful for fruit smoothies and salad dressings. Unrefined walnut oil has a smoke point of 320° F, and semirefined walnut oil has a smoke point of 400° F. Heat does tend to diminish the flavor of walnut oil.

Walnut oil contains:

- 19% MUFA
- 67% PUFA
- 14% SFA

Sesame oil

Used as both a condiment and cooking oil, sesame oil comes in raw, toasted, and seasoned varieties. It is especially suited to Asian dishes. For a richer and nuttier flavor, choose a darker sesame oil. Sesame oil is used in dipping sauces and salad dressings, and to finish cooked foods, such as noodles and rice.

It is used in foods cooked at a fairly low temperature. Unrefined sesame oil has a smoke point of 350° F, and semirefined sesame oil has a smoke point of 450° F. Sesame oil contains vitamin E, magnesium, copper, calcium, iron, and B vitamins. The sesamin and sesamol found in sesame oil lower cholesterol levels and protect the liver.

Sesame oil contains:

- 40% MUFA
- 46% PUFA
- 14% SFA

LOVE YOURSELF

Peanut oil

This oil may help to lower blood lipid levels, when used in conjunction with a moderate-fat diet. In fact, peanut oil is possibly as effective in protecting against heart disease as olive oil is. Peanut oil contains the antioxidant resveratrol, which is found in wine, and is believed to reduce the risks of cancer and heart disease. Peanut oil has a somewhat bland taste and is especially well suited to dishes containing nuts.

Refined peanut oil is used for popping popcorn, frying, roasting, and grilling. Unrefined peanut oil is used in dishes that call for low to moderate cooking temperatures, or in salad dressings, marinades, and chocolate-flavored smoothies.

Peanut oil contains:

- 49% MUFA
- 33% PUFA
- 18% SFA

References and recommended readings

Conan K. Time for an oil change? *Health*. 2004;18:186-192.

DeCoursy N. Need an oil change? *Redbook*. 2008;211:114.

Palmer S. The fairest fats of them all (and those to avoid). *Today's Dietitian*. 2008;10:36-40.

Stubbs M. Pantry primer: oils. *Body and Soul*. December 2008;42-43.

Review Date 4/09
G-0987