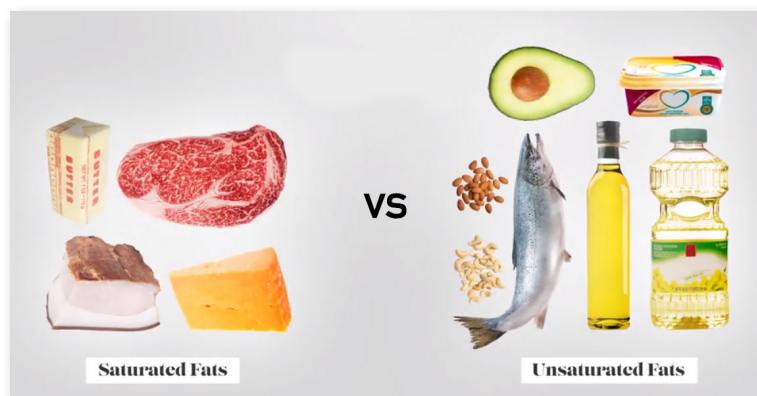


Is Coconut Oil Healthy?

The claims surrounding the health benefits of coconut oil in recent years have been hard to ignore. A simple Google search reveals hundreds of these claims, from boosting your immune system to preventing cardiovascular disease and even treating Alzheimer's. But what exactly is coconut oil, and why has it been labelled a superfood? We are about to break down the fact from fiction as we take a closer look...

Coconut oil is extracted from the flesh of the coconut, leaving behind the fibre, carbohydrate and protein parts of the plant, resulting in pure fat. There are many different types of fats, with the two major kinds being saturated fats (unhealthy fats linked with increased risk of heart disease) and unsaturated fats (healthy fats that can reduce your risk of heart disease). As a general rule, saturated fats tend to be solid at room temperature, and unsaturated fats tend to be liquid (however keep in mind there are some exceptions to this general rule). Coconut oil is solid at room temperature and is made up of 92% saturated fat - that's more saturated fat than butter! So where have all these miraculous health claims stemmed from?



The main argument put forward in the coconut oil debate is that even though it is made up of predominantly saturated fat, it doesn't behave like a saturated fat in the body. The scientific evidence on this claim however, just doesn't add up! Although one of the building blocks of coconut oil has been shown to mimic healthy unsaturated fats by boosting HDL (good) cholesterol, studies show that it also increases LDL (bad) cholesterol. Coconut oil is also extremely energy dense, with one tablespoon providing a whopping 505 kJ of energy! Unlike other plant oils, it also provides no added vitamins or antioxidant compounds (such as those found in extra virgin olive oil).

So should you make the switch to coconut oil? In short, no. The limited and contradicting evidence on the health benefits of coconut oil is simply not compelling enough to swap to an oil that is 92% saturated fat. A dietary pattern based on minimally processed foods including plenty of fruit, vegetables, nuts, legumes, wholegrains, lean meat or seafood, reduced fat dairy and healthy unsaturated fats is recommended for heart health. We should focus on including more of these foods rather than a select set of so called 'superfoods' to boost our health. Unfortunately, there is no short cut to good health!