

Oil is Well!

Good oils protect your heart, skin and waist. Follow our guide to using the best—in the right quantities

NEVER MIND ‘GREED is good’—there’s another 80s catchcry that’s even more passé: ‘All fats are bad.’ This old adage has hung around for years, despite a glut of evidence to the contrary.

And of course, not all oils are bad. Recent research shows that when ‘good’ fats—such as healthy oils—supply 20 to 35 per cent of your total daily kilojoules, your risk of obesity, heart disease and diabetes plummets. For Australian women, this translates to consuming approximately 3 tbs of good fat (including oil) per day.

So how do you choose between the good, the bad and the plain ugly fats? The bad and the ugly are found in fast foods and processed foods. Doughnuts, hot chips, chicken nuggets, potato chips, pastries and biscuits, for example, are packed with saturated and trans fats.

‘Good’ fats, such as the omegas, are unsaturated and found in wholefoods such as fish, nuts, avocado and minimally refined oils. Our modern diet offers plenty of omega-6 fats in the form of cereals, margarine and vegetable oil. But we tend to be deficient in omega-3s, largely because we don’t eat enough fish, nuts and seeds. Preparing foods with nut and seed oils can help redress the balance. And compared with Mediterranean countries, our diets can also lack omega-9s, which are found in fruit and nut oils, such as olive and macadamia.

I tested about 15 oils to compare flavour and nutrients, and these are my top performers. I particularly love the new Australian-produced chia-seed oil—a lighter and better tasting way to get your omega-3s than flaxseed oil.



SUE RADD is an accredited practising dietitian and founding director of Sydney’s Nutrition and Wellbeing Clinic (sueradd.com).

“Compared with Mediterranean countries, our diets can lack omega-9s, which are found in fruit and nut oils.”



» GOOD FOR STIR-FRIES

These sturdy oils are a great addition to Asian dishes as their flavours are authentic to the region. Peanut oil tastes relatively mild and is light in colour, making it the perfect base for stir-fries that feature strong flavours such as garlic or ginger. In contrast, sesame oil has a robust, distinctive, almost smoky flavour, so add it towards the end of the cooking process. I like to drizzle some into the pan just before I finish frying wholegrain rice.

» GOOD FOR SMOOTHIES

These up-and-comers are the richest plant sources of alpha-linolenic acid, which your body converts into the powerhouse omega-3 fats also found in fish oils. Flaxseed oil is a deeper colour, with a nuttier, slightly pungent flavour that’s a little bitter. So, if you prefer a more subtle flavour, opt for chia-seed oil. Omega-3 fats are delicate; store these oils in the fridge and use them raw—don’t heat them.

SLIPPERY QUESTIONS

» HOW DO I PREVENT KILOJOULE OVERLOAD?

If you’re watching your weight and only want a hint of oil (and fewer kilojoules), load a reusable pump spray with your favourite oil for dressing salads and cooking fish and vegetables. Also spray oil on pans, baking tins and dishes when you need to create a non-stick surface.

» IS LIGHT OLIVE OIL BETTER THAN EXTRA-VIRGIN?

The fat and kilojoule content of these two oils are the same. Light olive oil is more heavily refined, which removes some flavour and colour but also some antioxidants. Extra-virgin olive oil is tastier and retains more antioxidants. →

PHOTOGRAPHY: PLAMEN PETKOV; FOOD STYLING: VICTORIA GRANDI FOR ART DEPARTMENT; PROP STYLING: RICHARD ALFREDO FOR MARK EDWARD INC.

RICE-BRAN & CANOLA OILS

» **GOOD FOR SAUTÉING** These oils are neutral in flavour and light in colour. Rice-bran oil contains vitamin E and plant sterols, which help lower cholesterol. Canola oil is rich in omega-9 fats and also provides a good dose of alpha-linolenic acid. Both oils have a high smoke point, so they retain their quality and flavour when you heat them to high temperatures.

OLIVE & AVOCADO OILS

» GOOD FOR SALADS AND PRESERVES

It's hard to beat a fruity-yellow or peppery-green olive oil for the lift it gives salads and roast-vegie dishes. The extra-virgin variety, prized by Mediterranean cooks for centuries, offers loads of antioxidants, including oleocanthal, which reduces inflammation in the body. Pungent and green with phytonutrients, avocado oil supplies vitamins A, B, D and lecithin, which may also help lower cholesterol levels. But don't heat avocado oil; bitter flavours will develop.

MACADAMIA-NUT & SUNFLOWER OILS

» GOOD FOR BAKING

These are heart-smart choices for your cakes and biscuits. The light texture and subtle flavour of sunflower oil makes it very versatile. Macadamia-nut oil, which also comes in an extra-virgin variety, infuses friands and tarts with a delicious, nutty flavour. ♣

 **FIND OUT HOW** to use oils to flatten your belly. Go to flatbellydiet.com.au.

