



# Nutrition News

## All About Oils

Many online and social media sources claim that "industrial" or "refined" plant oils are harmful to health. The truth is more complicated than that.

Considerable research indicates many clear benefits, not harms, of plant oils. Plant oils are made by extracting the fats found in fruits (such as olives and coconuts), seeds (like canola, safflower, flaxseed and sesame), nuts (like almond and walnuts), legumes (like peanuts) and vegetable (like soybean).

### How They're Made

Several processes are used to refine, bleach and deodorize oils to create the consistent, mild-tasting products to which we are accustomed. Most of the major studies that demonstrate the health benefits of plant oils have used the refined versions commonly available in supermarkets. The bottom line: refined oils are a perfectly good choice, but there's no harm in looking for more minimally processed options. In that case, look for those labelled raw, cold pressed, virgin, extra virgin or pure. Unrefined oils usually have higher levels of phytochemicals, which may provide additional health benefits.

### To Fry, Sauté...Or Something Else

When it comes to cooking, some oils can handle the heat better than others. An oil's "smoke point" is the temperature at which it starts to break down. Oils with high smoke points (such as vegetable, peanut and sesame) are good for frying or high heat stir-frying, while oils with low

smoke points (flaxseed or walnut) work well in salad dressing and dips.

### Can I Re-Use Oil?

Sometimes. Whatever you do with oil after cooking with it, wait for it to cool. Some oils used for frying can be re-used once or twice, if strained through cheesecloth into a clean container to remove particles of food.

Discard cooking oil if it starts to smoke. It's lost some of its nutritional value and could impart a bitter, unpleasant taste to food. Heat and light will eventually damage most oils, causing them to lose nutrients.

Store oil in a cool, dark place, and replace it if it smells bitter or "off". Some oils – particularly polyunsaturated oils such as grapeseed or walnut oil – may turn rancid faster than other oils. Store these oils in the refrigerator to prolong their usability and use within a year to avoid rancidity.

When it comes time to dispose of old cooking oil, DON'T try dumping it down the sink or toilet where it can clog pipes. Small amounts of cooled oil can be soaked up with paper towels and dumped into the trash. For larger amounts, keep an old glass jar handy, pour the cooled oil into it, close the lid and dispose of it that way.

Plant oils are a rich source of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids, and can often be used in place of saturated fats like butter, coconut or palm oil, and lard. Heart-healthy plant oils may help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke by improving related risk factors such as blood cholesterol, blood pressure and inflammation.

*Turn the page for examples of common oils you can use in food preparation.*

Dutchess County Office for the Aging • 114 Delafield St., Poughkeepsie NY 12601  
(845) 486-2555 • toll free (866) 486-2555 • [www.dutchessny.gov/aging](http://www.dutchessny.gov/aging)

## All About Oils (continued)

**Avocado Oil:** Is a heart-nourishing choice. With a high smoke point, avocado oil is ideal for sautéing and frying fish or chicken, but it also is a beautiful finishing oil and a flavorful base for salad dressing.

**Olive Oil:** is high in monounsaturated fatty acids, which may help reduce the risk of heart disease. Extra-virgin olive oil has less acid, a fruitier flavor and stronger aroma than pure or virgin olive oil. Olive oil labelled as “light” is often lighter in hue or flavor, but not lighter in calories. Use olive oil in dressings, sautés, cakes, for dipping, and to fry vegetables and meat.

**Walnut Oil:** Made from dried and cold pressed nuts, walnut oil has a high concentration of alpha-linolenic acid that partially converts to omega-3s, which support heart health. Walnut oil doesn't stand up to a high heat, so its rich, nutty flavor is best used as a dressing or flavor enhancer rather than for cooking. Store this oil in the refrigerator.

**Flaxseed Oil:** With omega-6 and omega-9 essential fatty acids, heart-healthy flaxseed oil is often cited as a vegetarian alternative to fish oil. Flaxseed oil has a low smoke point, so it's not ideal for cooking. Instead, enjoy a drizzle over quinoa or combine it with herbs and vinegar to make a salad dressing.

**Grapeseed Oil:** Extracted from grape seeds, a by-product of winemaking. This oil is rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids, which lowers total cholesterol. Grapeseed oil has a moderately high smoke point, which makes it great for sautés and frying. It can also be used in dressings and dips for vegetables.

**Sunflower Oil:** Are high in polyunsaturated fatty acids (specifically linoleic acid), high oleic versions are significantly higher in monounsaturated fats. Unrefined sunflower oil breaks down at high temperatures; use it for dressings or as a finishing oil. Refined sunflower oil has a higher smoke point and neutral flavor, making it ideal for high-heat cooking such as baking, frying or sautéing.

**Peanut Oil:** Is a common monounsaturated fat and contains Vitamin E. This oil is often used in deep frying because of its high smoke point, while its distinctive flavor helps it shine in stir-fries and ginger dressing.

**Sesame Oil:** Sesame oil is rich in mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids. Is typically used in Asian cuisines and has a sweet, nutty flavor. Toasted sesame seed oil has a more intense flavor and aroma. Drizzle it over an Asian cabbage slaw with a sprinkle of black sesame seeds.

**Vegetable Oil:** Often soybean oil or a blend of soybean and other oils, vegetable oil contains primarily polyunsaturated fats and considerable monounsaturated and saturated fat. With a neutral flavor and good heat tolerance, this all-purpose oil is best used in baking and sautéing.

**Canola Oil:** Low in saturated fat, high in mono- and polyunsaturated fats, including omega-3s, canola oil has a light flavor that makes it a versatile ingredient. You can replace solid fats like butter or margarine with canola oil when cooking or baking. Canola oil works well for sautéing and stir-frying, and for coating pots, pans and grills to prevent sticking.

**Corn Oil:** An all-purpose cooking oil with a mild flavor and aroma, corn oil is high in polyunsaturated fatty acids. Corn oil is ideal for baking, sautéing or stir-frying. Use it to create flavorful Southwestern soups, stews or quesadillas.

**Coconut Oil:** A saturated fat extracted from the fruit of mature coconuts. Virgin coconut oil is high in lauric acid, a medium-chain fatty acid. Preliminary studies show that this acid may have a neutral or beneficial effect on cholesterol levels. Coconut oil has a sweet flavor and is often substituted for shortening or butter in vegan recipes. It imparts a tropical flavor to vegetables, curry dishes and fish.

Happy eating!

*Nimesh*