

Coconut oil is nature's elixir, a nutritional powerhouse

There is so much hype around fat these days — low-fat this and low-fat that. The bigger we get as a society, the more low-fat items we consume and vice versa. The more low-fat items we eat, the bigger we seem to get. Not surprisingly, studies no longer support the idea that low-fat means thinner, healthier bodies and that high-fat leads to obesity and poor health.

The fact is, human bodies need fat in order to function well. Fats have a variety of functions: for mineral absorption, to act as a carrier for important fat soluble vitamins like A, D, E and K, to provide building blocks for cell membranes and a variety of hormones and hormone-like substances, and for the conversion of carotene to vitamin A, in addition to a host of other processes.

We need saturated and unsaturated fats in order to maintain health. One type of saturated fat which has gotten a bad rap in the past is now considered one of the healthiest of oils: coconut oil, unrefined, extra virgin coconut oil.

This is not to be confused with the highly refined, deodorized and bleached coconut oil made from copra (dried coconut meat) — the deadly stuff used for cooking popcorn in movie theaters back in the day. The process of oil extraction that enables coconut oil to preserve its health-giving properties is the traditional method, using fresh coconut milk that is fermented for 24 to 36 hours. The water is then separated from the oil, lightly heated and filtered. The result is a clear, coconut scented and flavored oil.

This oil incorporates a powerhouse of amazing benefits. It has been called “nature’s elixir” to lose weight, prevent heart disease, cancer and diabetes, protect the liver from alcohol and other toxins, strengthen the immune system and beautify skin and hair. Unrefined coconut oil has about a 50 percent lauric acid content. Lauric acid, a fatty acid, has antiviral, antibacterial and antiprotozoal functions.

So with all these wonderful benefits, you may want to know how to use the stuff. Well, you could just eat a spoonful of it a day and be done with it. But, if you love to cook, you may enjoy the new, mild “coconutty” flavor it imparts on your favorite foods. Just try using it as a substitute for your regular oil. It’s especially delicious in stir-fries, soups and salads. I love using it in baked goods, pancakes and popcorn. I think I’ll go create a delicious coconut-flavored meal!

Jill Welch is a natural foods educator and chef with nearly 20 years of experience in helping people improve their diet and lifestyle, lose weight and stabilize their moods by adopting a natural foods way of life. For more information on natural foods living, as well as recipes and tips, visit TheKitchenGoddess.com.