



# *The big fat* **truth!**

**O**nce upon a time, in a land far away from the coconut laden tropical countries, coconut oil was extensively for home as well as large scale cooking. The country was the United States of America, where reportedly, even popcorn was popped with coconut oil as the medium. The oil was sourced from the Philippines and the other South Pacific Islands, and flowed plentifully to American shores.

Then came World War II. The Japanese took control over the lands that provided the coconut oil. America was forced to look for another option, and manufacturers came up with an alternative – enter soybean and corn oil. Local farmers began soybean and corn cultivation in earnest. A lot of money and energy was invested in promoting the new oil among the public. And much like everything else, it became immaterial as to whether or not something was really true or not – trade, commerce and politics were far more important.

## **The politics of the Oil Trade**

As early as 1934, the US government was taxing oils that were being imported for food purposes. This was a measure that was designed to 'protect domestically produced oils in their use in the production of edible products.' When the war was over, the economic condition

needed to stabilize, and paying money to get imported oils, when a local substitute could be used did not make sense. Meanwhile the lobbies for the locally produced oils began their campaign to ensure that their oils would be the ones that consumers would consistently prefer to use.

The tax on imported oils like palm and coconut was suspended from 1957 to 1963. In 1965 a group of companies that used coconut oil in their food products tried to get the tax repealed. They succeeded. These imported oils were by now, a small portion of the oils that the country was consuming, but still their lower costs caused the domestic oil producers to worry about the potential competition, locally as well as globally.

There was only one way to combat this condition. Peoples' perceptions about coconut oil had to alter. And that's exactly what happened. By the 1980s, more than 70% of America was using soybean oil, but this was still a figure that needed to change. Groups producing the domestic oils began what is now called the 'tropical grease campaign'. Active participants were the American Soybean Association, the Corn Products Company, and the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Their allegation was that all saturated fats are bad for the human body. Ironic really, since arteriosclerosis



– or heart disease, as we know it today actually began to be detected in higher numbers from the time that the American public started switching to the domestic oils. They did clinical studies to find out whether there could be any scientific proof that coconut oil was bad for you. And find proof they did. They found that saturated oils like coconut oil raised cholesterol. At the time, however, the scientific community did not know that there are two types of cholesterol – good and bad; or that raising good cholesterol was essential for keeping a good cholesterol ratio; or that coconut oil was very good at raising specifically the good cholesterol. On another note, many of the early studies used hydrogenated coconut oil. Any oil that has been hydrogenated is bad for the body. And anyone who uses coconut oil traditionally will tell you that the oil is always used in unrefined form. But that's all that it took for clever advertising to proclaim that coconut oil would cause cholesterol, clog your arteries and give you heart disease. Food makers switched to soybean oil and partially hydrogenated soybean oil (margarine).

### **The Coconut Oil Advantage**

Yes, coconut oil DOES contain saturated fats. But if you still believe that all saturated fats are bad for you, you need to get your chemistry right. The reason we've been told that saturated fats are bad for you, is mostly because of the Ancel Keys study linking saturated fats to poor heart health. (see box)

First off, plant based saturated fats do not work in our body the same way that saturated fats from animal sources, that are long-chained triglycerides, do. Secondly, saturated fats are essential for our body in certain amounts to ensure that many aspects of our metabolism work right. It's an important source of

fuel for our organs, is important for healthy brain and nervous system function, aids healthy cell function, contributes to better immunity and makes our skin more resistant to sun damage. When it comes to cooking, saturated oils are much more stable than the other 'heart healthy' polyunsaturated ones.

In coconut oil, almost fifty percent of the fatty acids are lauric acid. This is a medium chain fatty acid, which is turned into monolaurin in the human body. Monolaurin is one of the strongest weapons in the body's immunity arsenal. Monolaurin is the antiviral, antibacterial and antiprotozoal monoglyceride that the human or animal body uses to destroy



lipid coated viruses such as HIV, herpes, influenza and other harmful bacteria. The only other source that gives you lauric acid is mother's milk. A newborn baby is a being that is facing hundreds of potentially threatening infections and in the first few months, immunity is of crucial importance.

Researchers and nutritionists who have been seriously studying this issue say that coconut oil reduces the risk of arteriosclerosis, heart disease, cancer and other degenerative conditions. The lauric acid, protects and prevents against bacterial, viral and fungal infections. And unlike some other saturated fats, coconut oil does not raise bad cholesterol, instead it raises the good cholesterol, which makes

sure that the bad cholesterol gets flushed out of your body properly.

### **Medium-Chain Fatty Acid**

The reason coconut oil is so easily broken down in the human body is that it has medium chain triglycerides (MCT). This kind of fat burns up quickly in our body – it breaks down fast in our digestive system and is absorbed into the intestinal tract and goes on to the liver, gets into our cells and produces energy as ketones. Long chain fatty acids (LCT) break down more slowly. They travel from the intestines as 'chylomicrons' or large fat droplets and usually are dumped in the vicinity of the heart. From here they need to be transported through the body and then reach the liver. In more simple terms, the chemical breakdown and assimilation of the oils happens in two different ways. So what happens is that MCTs are used up quickly and not stored, whereas LCTs which take time to break down tend to be stored in the body as fat.

So as of now, the research points to the strong possibility that what we believed about coconut oil was wrong. The facts that we were given were the product of a combination of not enough understanding about the biochemistry of fats, overenthusiastic oil manufacturers whose main objective was profit, and a generation of scientists and doctors who were genuinely misled about the existing information. The point to focus on, though is that all of the leading nutritionists and many doctors and researchers are gaining a better understanding about this beneficial fat. And there is far too much proof about its health benefits and weight-loss advantages for you to ignore it blindly any more. It's time you gave coconut oil a closer look – and not take someone else's word for it!