

COCONUT OIL

By Xanthy Karr – Naturopath

The nutritional and medicinal benefits of coconut oil have in recent years been published, with much of the research being provided by Dr. Mary Enig.

Coconut oil is a saturated fat made up primarily of medium chain fatty acids. Also known as MCT's.

Over the years coconut oil has received negative reports because of its high level of saturated fat. However, research has shown that not all saturated fats are alike and that the medium chain triglycerides, do not raise cholesterol or contribute to heart disease, but are considered to be healthy fats. One only has to look at Asian cultures that eat considerable amounts of coconut, in their diet and do not suffer from diseases seen in Western cultures.

Researchers now know that weight loss associated with coconut oil is related to MCT's. These medium chain fatty acids are processed in the body differently to the common longer chain fatty acids found in other plant-based oils. Most vegetable oils are composed of long chain fatty acids (LCT's). LCT's are typically stored as fat, while MCT's are quickly burned up for energy. Coconut oil is nature's richest source of MCT's that increase metabolic rates and lead to weight loss.

One study showed that a MCT- containing meal caused an average 12% increase in basal metabolic rates compared with a 4% increase with a LCT- containing meal.

The most prominent MCT in coconut oil is Lauric acid. Approximately 50% of the fatty acids in coconut fat are lauric acid; this medium chain saturated fatty acid is known for its antimicrobial properties.

Lauric acid in coconut oil is used in the body to make the monoglyceride derivative, monolaurin. Monolaurin is anti-viral, antibacterial and antiprotozoal. This derivative of lauric acid is made in babies from ingested mothers milk to protect them from infections.

Dr. Mary Enig has classified coconuts as "functional food" which provides health benefits to all.

Reference: T.B.Seaton, S. L. Welles, M. K. Warenko, et al. "Thermic effects of medium-chain and long-chain triglycerides in man." *Am J Clin Nutr*, 1986;44:630-634.