

Coconut Oil's Consumption Boon to Human Health – A Review

Ravi Teja Mandapaka^{1*}, Venkata Shreya Kiran Vedantam², Sri Nagamani Jakkula³ and Vijaya Lakshmi Kanumuru³

¹Department of Foods and Nutritional Sciences (2008 - 2010), Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India

²Department of Biochemistry, (2008-2010) LIMS, La Trobe University Bundoora Vic 3086 Australia

³Department of Foods and Nutritional Sciences (2009 - 2011), Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India

***Corresponding Author:** Ravi Teja Mandapaka, Department of Foods and Nutritional Sciences (2008 - 2010), Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India.

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Abstract

Coconut, one of the sacred tree products in Indian Hindu rituals goes by the scientific name *Cocos nucifera* belongs to the family *Arecaceae*. As nutritionist ourselves, we understand and say, it has got quite unique advantages when taken as food. We believe in the notion of what Rockefeller Institute of Medicine research in New York once said. "If the doctors of today do not become the nutritionists of tomorrow, then the nutritionists of today will become the doctors of tomorrow". However, we understand the supremacy of daily intake of this very food is undervalued and underemphasized. There have been many studies whether consuming coconut oil leads to atherogenicity or not. But, as there's bad and good in life, consuming coconut oil has anti-microbial effects and it's anti-atherogenic by nature. This present review of ours is all about elucidating in detail the health benefits of coconut oil and its consumption.

Keywords: Coconut Oil; Antioxidants; Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids (PUFA); Monounsaturated Fatty Acids (MUFA)

Introduction

The health benefits of coconut oil include hair care, skin care, stress relief, maintaining cholesterol levels, weight loss, increased immunity, proper digestion and metabolism, relief from kidney problems, heart diseases, high blood pressure, diabetes, HIV and cancer, dental care, and bone strength. These benefits of coconut oil can be attributed to the presence of lauric acid, capric acid and caprylic acid, and its properties such as antimicrobial, antioxidant, antifungal, antibacterial, soothing, etc.

A study by Conrado S. Dayrit revealed that, Coconut oil, in fact, tends to raise the HDL and lower the LDL: HDL ratio. Coconut oil is not deposited in adipose tissues and therefore does not lead to obesity.

The human body converts lauric acid into monolaurin which is claimed to help in dealing with viruses and bacteria causing diseases such as herpes, influenza, cytomegalovirus, and even HIV. It helps in fighting harmful bacteria such as *listeria monocytogenes* and *heliobacter pylori*, and harmful protozoa such as *giardia lamblia*. As a result of these various health benefits of coconut oil, though its exact mechanism of action was unknown, it has been extensively used in Ayurveda, the traditional Indian medicinal system.

Coconut oil is often preferred by athletes and body builders and by those who are dieting. The reason behind this being that coconut oil contains lesser calories than other oils, its fat content is easily converted into energy and it does not lead to accumulation of fat in the heart and arteries. Coconut oil helps in boosting energy and endurance, and enhances the performance of athletes.

Composition: Coconut oil consists of more than ninety percent of saturated fats (Don't panic! First read to the last word. Your opinion may change.), with traces of few unsaturated fatty acids, such as monounsaturated fatty acids and polyunsaturated fatty acids. Virgin Coconut Oil is no different from this. Let us have a bit detailed study of this.

The Saturated Fatty Acids: Most of them are Medium Chain Triglycerides, which are supposed to assimilate well. Lauric Acid is the chief contributor, with more than forty percent of the share, followed by Capric Acid, Caprylic Acid, Myristic Acid and Palmitic Acid.

One example for the Poly Unsaturated Fatty Acid (PUFA) is Linoleic Acid. And one example for the Mono Unsaturated Fatty Acid (PUFA) Oleic Acid.

The Poly-phenols: Gallic Acid, which is phenolic acid. These poly-phenols are supposed to be responsible for the fragrance and the taste of Coconut Oil and Virgin Coconut Oil is rich in these poly-phenols.

Certain derivatives of fatty acid like Betaines, Ethanolamide, Ethoxylates, Fatty Esters, Fatty Polysorbates, Monoglycerides and Polyol Esters. Fatty Chlorides, Fatty Alcohol Sulphate and Fatty Alcohol Ether Sulphate, all of which are derivatives of Fatty Alcohols.

Health benefits of coconut oil include the following:

Hair Care: Coconut oil is one of the best natural nutrition for hair. It helps in healthy growth of hair providing them a shiny complexion. Regular massage of the head with coconut oil ensures that your scalp is free of dandruff, lice, and lice eggs, even if your scalp is dry. Coconut oil is extensively used in the Indian sub-continent for hair care. It is an excellent conditioner and helps in the re-growth of damaged hair. It also provides the essential proteins required for nourishing damaged hair. It is therefore used as hair care oil and used in manufacturing various conditioners, and dandruff relief creams. Coconut oil is normally applied topically for hair care.

Stress Relief: Coconut oil is very soothing and hence it helps in removing stress. Applying coconut oil to the head followed with a gentle massage helps in removing mental fatigue.

Skin Care: Coconut oil is excellent massage oil for the skin as well. It acts as an effective moisturizer on all types of skins including dry skin. The benefit of coconut oil on the skin is comparable to that of mineral oil. Further, unlike mineral oil, there is no chance of having any adverse side effects on the skin with the application of coconut oil. Coconut oil therefore is a safe solution for preventing dryness and flaking of skin. It also delays wrinkles, and sagging of skin which normally become prominent with age. Coconut oil also helps in treating various skin problems including psoriasis, dermatitis, eczema and other skin infections. Therefore coconut oil forms the basic ingredient of various body care products such as soaps, lotions, creams, etc., used for skin care.

Premature Aging: Coconut oil helps in preventing premature aging and degenerative diseases due to its antioxidant properties.

Heart Diseases: There is a misconception spread among many people that coconut oil is not good for the heart. This is because it contains a large quantity of saturated fats. However, coconut oil is beneficial for the heart. It contains about 50% lauric acid, which helps in preventing various heart problems including high cholesterol levels and high blood pressure. The saturated fats present in coconut oil are not harmful as it happens in case of other vegetable oils. It does not lead to increase in LDL levels. It also reduces the incidence of injury in arteries and therefore helps in preventing atherosclerosis.

Weight Loss: Coconut oil is very useful in reducing weight. It contains short and medium-chain fatty acids that help in taking off excessive weight. It is also easy to digest and it helps in healthy functioning of the thyroid and enzymes systems. Further, it increases the body

metabolism by removing stress on pancreases, thereby burning out more energy and helping obese and overweight people reduce their weight. Hence, people living in tropical coastal areas, who eat coconut oil daily as their primary cooking oil, are normally not fat, obese or overweight.

Pancreatitis: Coconut oil is also believed to be useful in treating pancreatitis.

Digestion: Internal use of coconut oil occurs primarily as cooking oil. Coconut oil helps in improving the digestive system and thus prevents various stomach and digestion related problems including irritable bowel syndrome. The saturated fats present in coconut oil have anti-microbial properties and help in dealing with various bacteria, fungi, parasites, etc., that cause indigestion. Coconut oil also helps in absorption of other nutrients such as vitamins, minerals and amino acids.

Immunity: Coconut oil is also good for the immune system. It strengthens the immune system as it contains antimicrobial lipids, lauric acid, capric acid and caprylic acid which have antifungal, antibacterial and antiviral properties. The human body converts lauric acid into monolaurin which is claimed to help in dealing with viruses and bacteria causing diseases such as herpes, influenza, cytomegalovirus, and even HIV. It helps in fighting harmful bacteria such as *listeria monocytogenes* and *heliobacter pylori*, and harmful protozoa such as *giardia lamblia*.

Healing: When applied on infections, it forms a chemical layer which protects the infected body part from external dust, air, fungi, bacteria and virus. Coconut oil is most effective on bruises as it speeds up the healing process by repairing damaged tissues.

Infections: Coconut oil is very effective against a variety of infections due to its antifungal, antiviral, and antibacterial properties. According to the Coconut Research Center, coconut oil kills viruses that cause influenza, measles, hepatitis, herpes, SARS, etc. It also kills bacteria that cause ulcers, throat infections, urinary tract infections, pneumonia, and gonorrhea, etc. Coconut oil is also effective on fungi and yeast that cause candidiasis, ringworm, athlete's foot, thrush, diaper rash, etc.

Liver: The presence of medium chain triglycerides and fatty acids helps in preventing liver diseases as they substances are easily converted into energy when they reach the liver, thus reducing work load on the liver and also preventing accumulation of fat.

Kidney: Coconut oil helps in preventing kidney and gall bladder diseases. It also helps in dissolving kidney stones.

Diabetes: Coconut oil helps in controlling blood sugar, and improves the secretion of insulin. It also helps in effective utilization of blood glucose, thereby preventing and treating diabetes.

Bones: As mentioned earlier, coconut oil improves the ability of our body to absorb important minerals. These include calcium and magnesium which are necessary for development of bones. Thus coconut oil is very useful to women who are prone to osteoporosis after middle age.

Dental Care: Calcium is an important element present in teeth. Since coconut oil facilitates absorption of calcium by the body, it helps in getting strong teeth. Coconut oil also stops tooth decay.

HIV and Cancer: It is believed that coconut oil plays an instrumental role in reducing viral susceptibility of HIV and cancer patients [1-7].

Conclusion

It's high time; the oil industry produces lauric acid, scientifically called dodecaonic acid, for it is useful in curing ailments like Influenza, Common Cold, Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV), Genital Warts and AIDS. It's a saturated fatty acid and can be found in many an edible vegetable. As nutritionists, we say, more research has to be focused on studying the functional properties, keep alone it's usage in the field of medicine.

As a functional food or a food possessing health-giving benefits, we are sure, this becomes a huge boom for the mankind. Lastly, we say, nations who are more focused on scientific and clinical research has to put more pressure on international bodies like World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) if only for them to recognize the oil's humongous importance to the human mankind upon consumption. We hope, that day, is not so long.

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