

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Comparing the Best Cooking Oils”

When it comes to cooking with oils, paying attention to their smoke point (the temperature at which they begin to break down) is key. **Olive Oil.** Extra-virgin olive oil has a relatively low smoke point of 325°F to 375°F, so it’s best for sautéing over medium heat or used for dressing salads. It is not ideal for deep-frying. Olive oil is widely known as a heart-healthy cooking oil choice, but other oils can be fairly healthy too. Olive oil is regularly touted as a top health food and superior dietary fat. This is largely due to its high monounsaturated fatty acid content compared to saturated fats. Consuming monounsaturated fats can help lower your low-density lipoprotein (“bad” LDL) cholesterol, which may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke. Extra-virgin olive oil also contains more than 30 phenolic compounds, which boast anti-inflammatory and blood vessel-expanding characteristics. Olive oil is known as a “healthy fat.” Olive oil consumption has links to weight loss and increases in overall longevity. **Canola Oil.** Having a diet that features canola oil as a primary cooking fat can result in lower total cholesterol levels. Canola is relatively versatile with its higher smoke point of 400°F. While it’s not as flavorful as olive oil and you may not want to put it on your salads, it can be used for sautéing, frying, and baking. However, watch out for highly processed canola oils. **Flaxseed Oil.** This oil, which has a very low smoke point of 225°F, should not be used for any kind of cooking. It does have a pleasant nutty flavor, which make it perfect for salad dressing and drizzling on various foods. Flaxseed oil is high in monounsaturated fats and is also one of the few vegan sources of omega-3 fatty acids, which are also found in certain oily fish, like salmon, mackerel, and sardines. The consumption of omega-3 fatty acids has been linked to lower lipid levels and reduced blood pressure. **Sesame Oil.** The oil with a high smoke point, sesame oil may be among your best bets. With a smoke point of 450°F, it’s great for frying and stir-frying and it also boasts a strong flavor, which can add to Asian-style dishes. Sesame oil is rich in both monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids, and low in saturated fats. Research indicates that sesame oil is good for heart health. **Coconut Oil.** Coconut oil has increased in popularity recently, mostly due to its role in the keto and Paleo diets, but its nutritional value is a point of controversy. Coconut oil is made up of 90% saturated fatty acids, which may raise your LDL cholesterol and triglycerides.

In the America that I love, choose your cooking oil wisely.

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