

## ⚡ Coconut Oil Deep Dive: Is Coconut Oil Healthy?

Coconut oil is mostly saturated fat (82-90%), with only ~ 13-15% as medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs). It raises both LDL ("bad") and HDL ("good") cholesterol. Overall, high intake of saturated fat is still linked with increased cardiovascular risk.

### Health Claims Vs. Reality:

- **MCTs:** Pure MCT oil behaves differently, but coconut oil is only partly MCTs.
- **Weight loss & brain health:** Popular claims are not supported by strong human evidence.
- **Traditional diets:** In Pacific Island cultures, coconuts are consumed as whole foods (flesh, milk), within plant-rich diets and active lifestyles-not as refined oil.

**Heat stability:** One positive is that coconut oil is relatively stable at high cooking temperatures, which makes it useful in certain recipes. Still, moderation is key.

**Calories:** Like all oils, coconut oil is ~ 120 calories per tablespoon and contains no fiber or water.





## Tropical Oils: Coconut & Palm

Both coconut and palm oils are high in saturated fat, so they should be used sparingly. Coconut oil is relatively stable at high heat, but scientific evidence does not support it as a miracle health food.

**Palm oil** poses similar health cautions but is more concerning for the environment: large-scale plantations contribute to deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, and habitat loss for wildlife like orangutans and elephants. Sustainable palm oil initiatives exist, but enforcement is inconsistent.

### Saturated Fat: The Bigger Picture

- Found mainly in animal fats (butter, cheese, tallow) and tropical oils (coconut, palm).
- Consistently shown to raise LDL cholesterol when eaten in excess.
- Health improves when saturated fats are replaced with unsaturated fats (olive oil, nuts, seeds, soy).
- Not all saturated fats are identical, and whole foods (like coconut flesh or dark chocolate) behave differently in the context of a balanced diet.
- **Trans fats:** Unlike saturated fats, trans fats (from hydrogenation) are strongly harmful, raising LDL and lowering HDL. They are now largely banned but can still appear in reused frying oils.





**Bottom line: Coconut oil doesn't appear to be a miracle food, and it's best to use sparingly. For everyday health, rely more on whole-food fats like nuts, seeds, avocado, and olives, or well-studied oils such as extra-virgin olive oil.**

### **References & Further Reading**

- Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health: Coconut Oil (<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/food-features/coconut-oil/>)
- American Heart Association: Dietary Fats (<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/fats>)
- World Health Organization: Healthy Diet (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/healthy-diet>)
- Blue Zones: Food Habits of the World's Longest-Lived (<https://www.bluezones.com/2023/07/food-habits-of-the-worlds-longest-lived/>)

