

NATURE'S MIRACLE OIL

By Bruce Fife, N.D.

If I asked you which dietary oil provides the widest range of health benefits, what would be your answer? If I asked you what oil can protect you from heart disease, rev up your metabolism, help you lose excess weight, protect you from cancer, and prevent infectious disease, what would you answer? Is it olive oil? Flaxseed oil? Borage oil?...The answer is "no" on all three accounts. Is there such an oil? You bet there is. If I told you that this oil happened to be coconut oil, would you be surprised? Most people would.

Once mistakenly believed to be bad for the heart because of its saturated fat content, coconut oil is now known to contain a unique form of saturated fat that actually helps prevent heart disease, stroke, and hardening of the arteries as well as provide many other health benefits.

Asian and Polynesian people who rely on coconut and coconut oil as a part of their daily diet have the lowest heart disease rates in the world. Some of these people get as much as 50 percent of their total daily calories as saturated fat, primarily from coconut oil. If coconut oil caused heart disease, as some people used to believe, these people would have all died off centuries ago. Those populations who consume large quantities of coconut oil have remarkably good cardiovascular health. Absent are the heart attacks and strokes characteristic in Western countries where coconut oil is rarely used.

What many people don't realize is that there are many different types of saturated fat, just as there are different types of polyunsaturated fat. Each has a different effect on the body. The saturated fat in coconut oil is unlike the fat found in meat or even other vegetable fats. It is identical to a special group of fats found in human breast milk called medium-chain fatty acids (MCFA). These special fatty acids have been shown to stimulate the metabolism, improve digestion, strengthen the immune system, and protect against bacterial, viral, and fungal infections as well as protect the heart and arteries from the conditions that cause heart disease. For these and other reasons, coconut oil, in one form or another, is now routinely used in hospital IV solutions and commercial baby formulas.

One of the major differences between MCFA and other fats is the way in which they are digested and metabolized. Most all fats in our diet whether they be saturated or unsaturated are in the form of large molecules called long-chain fatty acids (LCFA). Both vegetable oils and animal fats are composed almost entirely of long-chain fatty acids (LCFA). The medium-chain fatty acids (MCFA) in coconut are much smaller in size. The size makes a big difference.

The large LCFA are digested slowly. As they are absorbed through the intestinal wall they are combined into bundles of fat and protein called lipoproteins. These lipoproteins are sent into the bloodstream to be distributed throughout the body. These are the fats that end up on artery walls and fill up fat cells.

MCFA, on the other hand, are so small that they don't need pancreatic enzymes for digestion and are quickly absorbed and channeled directly to the liver rather than the bloodstream. In the liver

they are used as fuel to produce energy. Therefore, they don't circulate in the bloodstream like other fats. Consequently, they don't collect on artery walls or contribute to hardening of the arteries and don't collect in fat cells or contribute to weight gain. They are used to produce energy not arterial plaque and not body fat.

The fact that the fatty acids in coconut oil are used as fuel to generate energy, rather than put into storage like other fats, provides many remarkable health benefits. The most obvious is a boost in energy. The energy boost is not like the kick you get from caffeine, it's more subtle and longer lasting. It is most noticeable as an increase in endurance.¹ This effect is accumulative, that is, energy level increases with daily use. Studies have shown when athletes are given MCFA during training their performance and endurance improves.² For this reason, coconut oil, in one form or another, is added to many sports drinks and energy bars.

Because coconut oil produces energy, it stimulates the metabolism supporting thyroid function. This thermogenic or metabolic stimulating effect causes the body to burn more calories. For this reason, coconut oil can actually promote weight loss. It sounds strange that a fat can actually help you lose weight, but because of its metabolic effects that's what it can do. Numerous dietary studies have shown that replacing LCFA with MCFA from coconut oil, yield meals having a lower effective calorie content.³

Studies indicate that medium-chain fatty acids stimulate metabolism enough to burn up the calories in the oil as well as calories from other sources. So MCFA can help burn up the calories it contributes as well as those contributed by LCFA in our foods.

Dr. Julian Whitaker, a well-known authority on nutrition and health, makes an interesting analogy which describes this process. He explains that LCFA are like heavy wet logs that you put on a small campfire. Keep adding the logs, and soon you have more logs than fire. MCFA, on the other hand, are like rolled up newspapers soaked in gasoline. They not only burn brightly, but will burn up the wet logs as well.

Research supports Dr. Whitaker's view. In one study, the thermogenic (fat-burning) effect of a high-calorie diet containing 40 percent fat as MCFA was compared to one containing 40 percent fat as LCFA. The thermogenic effect of the MCFA was almost twice as high as the LCFA. The researchers concluded that the excess energy provided by fats in the form of MCFA would not be efficiently stored as fat, but rather would be burned. A follow-up study demonstrated that MCFA given over a six-day period can increase diet-induced thermogenesis by 50 percent.^{4,5}

In another study, researchers compared single meals of 400 calories composed entirely of MCFA and of LCFA. The thermogenic effect of MCFA over six hours was three times greater than that of LCFA. Researchers concluded that substituting MCFA for LCFA would produce weight loss as long as the calorie level remained the same.⁶

Coconut oil contains the most concentrated natural source of MCFA available. Substituting coconut oil for other vegetable oils in your diet will help promote weight loss. The use of refined vegetable oil actually promotes weight gain, not just from its calorie content, but because of its harmful effects on the thyroid-the gland that controls metabolism. Polyunsaturated vegetable oils depress

thyroid activity, thus lowering metabolic rate-just the opposite of coconut oil. Eating polyunsaturated oils, like soybean oil, will contribute more to weight gain than any other fat known, even more than beef tallow and lard. According to researcher Ray Peat, Ph.D., unsaturated oils block thyroid hormone secretion, its movement in the circulation, and the response of tissues to the hormone.⁷ When thyroid hormones are deficient, metabolism becomes depressed. Polyunsaturated oils are, in essence, high-calorie fats, which encourage weight gain more than any other fats. If you wanted to lose weight, you would be better off eating lard, because lard doesn't interfere with thyroid function.

If you want to lose excess weight, the best thing you can do is to avoid polyunsaturated oils that make you fat and start using coconut oil-the world's only natural low-calorie fat.

Nature puts MCFA in breast milk for many reasons. It's ability to be quickly digested for use as energy is an important one. This feature allows for enhanced nutrient absorption compared with other fats. LCFA found in most foods are much more difficult to digest. Infants cannot yet digest and metabolize LCFA effectively. Therefore, easily digestible MCFA are essential to a baby's survival. That is one reason why coconut oil is added to infant formula.

MCFA are not only important to infants, but for older children and adults as well. Because it is easy to digest, coconut oil has been a lifesaver for many people. It is used medicinally in special food preparations for those who suffer digestive disorders and have trouble digesting fats. For this reason, it is also used for the treatment of malnutrition. Since it is rapidly absorbed, it can deliver quick nourishment without putting excessive strain on the digestive and enzyme systems, and helps conserve the body's energy that would normally be expended in digesting other fats.

Medium-chain fatty acids also improve the absorption of many other nutrients. The absorption of minerals (particularly calcium and magnesium), B vitamins, fat soluble vitamins (A, D, E, K and beta-carotene) and also amino acids have been found to increase when infants are fed a diet containing coconut oil.

Patients suffering from vitamin B deficiencies have been helped simply by giving them coconut oil. The oil itself doesn't supply any B vitamins but enhances the utilization of the vitamins already in the diet.

Coconut oil has also been used to enhance absorption and retention of calcium and magnesium when a deficiency of these minerals exists. This is especially true in the case of rickets, which involves a vitamin D deficiency and the demineralization of the bones. Children suffering from rickets have recovered simply by adding coconut oil to their diet. For those who are concerned about developing osteoporosis as they get older, coconut oil may also be useful in helping to slow down this degenerative process by improving mineral absorption.

It's no wonder nature put MCFA in breast milk. The unique fatty acids are easy to digest, supply a source of quick energy, support thyroid function (which enhances healing and immune system function), and improves nutrient absorption. In addition, medical research indicates coconut oil may be useful in protecting against heart disease, breast and colon cancer, liver disease, kidney

disease, Crohn's disease, epilepsy, candida, herpes, influenza, and numerous other infectious diseases.

Fortunately, babies aren't the only ones who can benefit from MCFA. We can enjoy all of the benefits of MCFA by adding coconut oil to our diets.

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