



Nutrition Nibbles

Cuckoo for Coconuts

by Katie Giebler, RD

Coconut has become the latest buzzword in healthy diets these days. With purported health benefits such as improving the HDL/LDL cholesterol ratio, boosting thyroid function, increasing energy and alertness, and pumping up metabolism to encourage weight loss, who wouldn't want coconuts to be a key player in their diet? With the support of internet bloggers, radical nutrition aficionados, and health authorities like Dr. Oz, the power of this tropical fruit appears to be undeniable: claims range from eradicating peptic ulcers, alleviating depression, warding off cancer, and curing diabetes. Even with the outpouring of these promising health claims in all forms of media, the medical community has advised shunning excessive consumption of coconuts from our diets because of its known property for being one of the only plant sources high in saturated fat. And as we know, high amounts of saturated fat can lead to atherosclerosis (buildup of plaque in the arteries caused by high cholesterol) and cardiovascular disease over time, regardless of where the saturated fat in the diet is coming from. With these conflicting views, it is expected to cause some

confusion as to whether to embrace the coconut craze or overlook it as one of nutrition world's many fads.

The coconut's impressive history has helped develop its reputation into the one it holds today. For thousands of years, coconuts have held a valuable and respected place in Indian folk medicine. In Ayurvedic medicine, the oil, milk, cream, and water were all used to treat hair loss, burns, and heart problems. The coconut is held in high religious regard in India, and was known as the "fruit of aspiration" and offered to the gods. Coconut water was used as an intravenous solution to correct dehydration during World War II. Coconut milk and cream are common ingredients defining the characteristic flavor of Indian, Indonesian, Thai, and Vietnamese cuisines. Coconuts arrived into the market in many forms, most notably, coconut oil, water, milk, and manna. Since these all come from the same fruit, are there any differences between these products and is one form more beneficial for our health over others?

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College Corner: **SUMMER RE-BOOT CAMP**

Life is hectic especially during the school year. Summer is the perfect time to reboot your nutritional hard drive so to speak and refresh your palate. Here's how:

1 Shutdown unhealthy habits that crept up over last semester. Put an end to late night fast food runs, subsisting on processed convenience foods, and quenching your thirst with calorie-filled beverages.

2 Autocorrect your system by stocking up on satisfying snacks like fresh fruits, chopped veggies, nuts, string cheese, low fat yogurt, whole grain crackers, and hummus.

3 Find your stove and replace your microwave. Instead of zapping a frozen meal for dinner, create a quick and nutritious supper the speed-scratch way. Stir-fry some chicken and vegetables and serve over rice or brown some ground turkey, combine with marinara sauce and veggies, and pour over pasta.

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Questions or Comments? Email me at marymahoneyrd@gmail.com

Cuckoo for Coconuts cont...

Coconut oil is extracted from the meat of mature coconuts and has been the primary source of fat in the diets of millions of people for generations. Its multifaceted quality has coconut oil making appearances in cosmetics, medicine, and industry. Because of its high saturated fat content, it is slow to oxidize and, thus, resistant to rancidity, lasting up to two years on the shelf. Coconut oil also contains a large amount of lauric acid, a saturated fat that can raise HDL and LDL cholesterol. Coconut oil may be a better alternative for partially hydrogenated fats, but its chemical composition may promote atherosclerosis. In addition, coconut oil is composed of mostly medium-chain triglycerides, which is a different form of saturated fat that has been postulated to speed metabolism. Similar to coconut oil, coconut manna, or coconut butter, contains fats and oils, along with 12% fiber and 9% protein. **Coconut manna** is used in various recipes as a replacement for milk, cream, yogurt, butter, even peanut butter.

Coconut water is the clear liquid found within young coconuts. It has been marketed as a natural energy drink since it contains a high potassium and mineral content along with low amounts of fat, calories, and carbohydrates. Despite individuals who swear by its hydrating and exercise recovery properties, studies investigating these health properties have come up short.

Coconut milk is the liquid that comes from grating the meat. Consumers find coconut

milk appealing since it is a dairy alternative believed to promote weight loss. Evidence in support of this belief is very slim and excessive consumption of coconut milk is discouraged due to its high saturated fat content. As mentioned earlier, coconuts are a good source of medium-chain triglycerides that may speed metabolism; however, it is not clear whether a faster metabolic rate from coconuts translates to weight loss. In addition, there's still no proof that medium-chain triglycerides are any healthier for the heart than other forms of saturated fat.

The bottom line regarding coconuts and its many forms: use in moderation and wait until there is evidence to back up its health claims. Plain water or sports drinks are equally as effective for hydration as coconut water. The medium-chain triglycerides found in coconut oil, milk, and manna still have unproven potential to speed up metabolism, so coconut products should not be considered health foods...yet. Until researchers conclude that coconuts promote weight loss while maintaining LDL cholesterol levels, enjoy coconut fats sparingly to add flavor and variety to ethnic dishes.

Keep In Touch!

Have a nutrition question? Want the latest diet info? Need some health 4-1-1? Follow me on Facebook and Twitter: MaryMahoney, RD OR @marymahoney_rd I'd love to hear from you!

SUMMER RE-BOOT CAMP CONTINUED...

4 Reformat your beverage intake. This summer, stay hydrated with good ol' water. Spice it up with a twist of lime or a sprig of mint.

5 Choose an international theme for summer. If you're traveling abroad, awaken your palate and stretch your senses by embracing the local diet and eating customs. Staying put? Do a little research and choose a cuisine you'd like to explore. Gather recipes and create a different worldly-meal each week.

6 Insert a new page into your summer plans by testing out a new health habit. Experiment in the kitchen with an unusual ingredient from the grocery store, attempt a different type of physical exercise, or have a go at growing a garden. Get creative!

7 Track your changes until the new school year and see just how much your health, diet, and attitude have progressed. This will also keep you from going into sleep mode and completely checking-out from your body this summer!

Enjoy your time off!

