

CAN COCONUT OIL HELP YOU LOSE WEIGHT?

What do you think of when coconut oil is mentioned? Saturated Fat? Bad for me?

It is true that coconut oil is a saturated fat but there are different types of saturated fats. Coconut oil, from a plant source, is a different type of saturated fat than the saturated fats from animal sources. Fats are classified as saturated, monounsaturated or polyunsaturated. Fats are also classified based on the size of the fat molecule (or fatty acids). Fatty acids are classified as short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs) and long-chain fatty acids (LCFAs). Coconut oil is composed mainly of medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs).

Triglycerides are where three fatty acids are joined together by a glycerol molecule. There are short-chain triglycerides (SCTs), medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs) and long-chain triglycerides (LCTs). The terms fatty acid and triglycerides are often used interchangeably.

MCTs in coconut oil are very easily digested and as a result they may improve the absorption of other nutrients such as magnesium and calcium; some of the B vitamins; Vitamins A, D, E and K plus beta carotene and some amino acids.

What are the benefits of coconut oil during a weight management programme?

A study undertaken at the School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition, McGill University, Quebec, Canada concludes:-

“Consumption of a diet rich in MCTs results in greater loss of AT (adipose tissue) compared with LCTs, perhaps due to increased energy expenditure and fat oxidation observed with MCT intake. Thus, MCTs may be considered as agents that aid in the prevention of obesity or potentially stimulate weight loss.”¹

- Coconut oil contains only 8.6 calories per gram where most fats contain 9 calories per gram.
- Coconut oil or the MCTs in coconut oil satisfy hunger more than other foods. Adding coconut to your diet may help you to become satisfied sooner and you may not get as hungry between meals. This may reduce snacking and daily calorie intake.
- Coconut oil increases metabolism. This stimulating effect may reduce the number of effective calories in meals which include coconut possibly due to increased energy expenditure and fat oxidation.
- Coconut flour and coconut meat (fresh or dried) are high in fibre. As little as an additional 14 grams of fibre a day added to the diet may result in reduced calorie intake and loss of body weight.

How much coconut oil?

It is recommended that fats in the diet are replaced with coconut oil to a maximum of 3 tablespoons a day. This includes all sources of coconut oil including coconut milk or cream; coconut meat [fresh, dried or shredded coconut] and cooked or processed items which include coconut.

However there is a need to reduce these levels when introducing coconut to the diet for 2 reasons:-

- Some reduction of normal fat intake in the diet is required to enable loss of weight. Excessive intake of coconut oil may cause a weight increase.
- Coconut Oil is a potent gut and bowel detoxifier and needs to be gradually introduced into the diet. It is recommended the initial intake be no more than 1 tablespoon a day for the first few weeks from all forms.

Too much coconut oil too quickly can cause flatulence, cramps and loose bowels as the coconut oil detoxifies.

What to look out for in coconut products?

Coconut Cream or Coconut Milk – look for a brand that contains no additives.

Coconut Meat – avoid packaged items with added sugar.

Coconut Oil – use only food grade coconut oil and avoid any coconut oil that has been hydrogenated or has additives.

Coconut oil solidifies in cooler weather it may become white and semi-solid or in warmer weather a thick, oily liquid.

This is normal.

Sourced:

“Coconut Cures” Fife, B., N.D., 2005, Piccadilly Books, Colorado Springs

“Nourishing Traditions” Fallon, S. with Eng, M.G., Ph.D., 2001, New Trends Publishing Inc., Washington, DC

References:

- “Medium-chain triglycerides increase energy expenditure and decrease adiposity in overweight men.”
St-Onge MP, Ross R, Parsons WD, Jones PJ., School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition, Ste-Anne-de-Belleve, Quebec, Canada. Sourced on-line available at <http://www.nature.com/oby/journal/v11/n3/abs/oby200353a.html>