



## Coconut oil unlike other saturated fat

**I've always read that you should avoid coconut oil because of its high level of saturated fat. But I recently heard it is actually healthful and can help you lose weight. Is that true?**

Most nutritionists don't believe consuming coconut oil will help with weight loss — the evidence is far from conclusive on that point. But most will also concede that the oil may not be the demon many think it is.

To be honest, when it comes to nutrition research, the "truth" often seems elusive. Studies pronounce one verdict and then new findings point in another direction. That's simply the nature of the scientific process and the complexity surrounding nutrition and health. As long as we persist in hunting for more precise answers, we'll continue to encounter surprises.

Your question is a perfect example. In the 1980s, saturated fat was demonized as health-threat No. 1 as we became more aware that diets high in saturated fat contribute to high blood cholesterol and coronary artery disease. And the message got through: According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, consumption of saturated fat decreased 4 percent between 1970 and 1994, even as consumption of total fat increased 3 percent and calories increased 15 percent. The decline in saturated fat was credited to the increased availability of leaner red meat

and the shift of consumer preferences toward poultry and fish.

Because coconut oil contains a shockingly high level of 92 percent saturated fat (compared with 66 percent in butter), it gets grouped in the "consume less" category in dietary recommendations. But nutrition experts always knew that not all saturated fats are alike.

To be specific, coconut oil's saturated fat comes in the form of medium-chain triglycerides, which are more easily digested than long-chain triglycerides from animal fats, and which are readily oxidized in the liver. An analysis of research on the topic in the March 2002 *Journal of Nutrition* concluded that consuming medium-chain triglycerides can help the body burn more calories, and might help you feel fuller (and thus help you eat less) if you consume them instead of their long-chain cousins. But the studies were small and sometimes had conflicting results.

For now, the best anyone can tell you is that coconut oil may not be as bad as we thought, but neither can it be labeled as the ultimate health food. And, remember, although it's important for researchers to examine the effects of different fats, the bottom line in terms of weight is the overall number of calories you consume.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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**By Martha Filipic**  
(614) 292-9833  
[filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu)

**Editor:**

This column was reviewed by Martha Belury, associate professor of human nutrition for the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center and the College of Education and Human Ecology.

To receive Chow Line by e-mail, send a message to [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu) or sign up at <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/subscribe.php>.

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**Section of Communications  
and Technology  
News and Media Relations**  
2021 Coffey Road  
Columbus, OH 43210-1044  
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services  
Building  
1680 Madison Ave.  
Wooster, OH 44691-4096  
(330) 263-3780

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