

COCONUT GOES COOL

Rich in antioxidants, coconut is a super food that has many healing properties

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

From being maligned initially for being a wrong fat to now being hailed as a super food, incidentally for the same fat, coconut and its byproducts are now under the spotlight. Coconut oil, in particular, has a great reputation in traditional societies, particularly in India. The oil is considered a super food because of its unique combination of fatty acids that have positive effects on health. According to ancient Ayurvedic scripts, coconut is 'kalpa vriksha' or the 'the tree that supplies all that is needed to live'.

ADVANTAGES

Coconut is high in fibre and MCTs (Medium Chain Triglycerides); it offers a number of benefits, such as improved heart health, weight reduction and digestion. The MUFA (Monounsaturated fat) in coconut oil is made of oleic acid which has anti-cancer benefits and PUFA (Polyunsaturated fatty acid) which has linoleic acid which is an essential fatty acid. Harshita Dilawri, nutritionist at Know Your

Nutrients, Delhi says, "There are several benefits of cooking with this super food. MCT, which is a healthy form of dietary fat, can be broken down rapidly and absorbed to provide health benefits starting from skin repair to weight management. It can also aid digestive health owing to their shorter chain length and is absorbed quickly in the body hence aids gastrointestinal health." Shikha Mahajan, holistic nutritionist, Diet Podium says, "One of the most significant properties of coconut oil is that, it is 'thermogenic'—which means that it increases our energy expenditure compared to the other calories from different fats. By including coconuts in our daily diet, it reduces our appetite and increases the fat burning process effectively as it contains a unique combination of fatty acids with powerful effects on metabolism." Ushakiran Sisodia, clinical nutritionist and lifestyle medicine practitioner, Nanavati Super Specialty Hospital says, "Coconut milk is excellent for babies and elderly. The solid white flesh, called coconut meat, is also a good source of nutrients."





HEALTH MATTERS

People who have chronic kidney issue are advised to avoid coconut because of the high potassium content in it. Karan Kakkad, founder and CEO, Reverse Factor says, "Tender coconuts are the healthiest. The water in the tender coconut is one of the highest sources of electrolytes which helps keep the body properly hydrated. It is recommended to drink it after an intense workout rather than the commercial sports drinks." Coconut has a whopping 61 per cent dietary

fibre content. Like all high-fibre food, coconut fibre slows down the release of glucose, relieving stress on the pancreas and enzyme production. "Coconut contains useful nutrients like cytokinins, kinetin and trans-zeatin which are known to have anti-ageing effects. They are also known to have anti-carcinogenic properties," says Ghazal Alag, co-founder, Mamaearth. The human body needs 15-20 per cent fat daily. Our body needs both saturated as well as unsaturated fat. "Coconut oil contains lauric acid

(which is medium chain triglyceride), myristic acid and palmitic acid (which is long chain triglyceride). The unique combination of fatty acids has positive effects on our health. The desirable ratio of polyunsaturated to saturated fat in diet is 1:1. It is said that fresh coconut meat has healing properties because it is high in antioxidants," says Dr Sandipa Sen, chief dietitian, Malathi Manipal Hospitals, Jayanagar, Bengaluru. If you are looking to lose weight, coconut oil is a great ingredient. Vidhya Ramasubramanian,

chief nutritionist, Cloudnine Group of Hospitals, Bengaluru says, "The medium chain triglycerides in coconut oil have been shown to increase calories burned over 24 hours by as much as five per cent. Fatty acids in coconut oil play a leading role in decreasing appetite, thus playing a distinguished role in weight loss diets."

OIL STORY

Virgin coconut oils and cold-pressed coconut oils are the best to cook with. Not all refined coconut oils

are indistinguishable and most are refined utilising a concoction refining process reliant on solvents or they are produced using the rotten oil residues remaining from making desiccated (dry) coconut pieces. "Tragically, these are refined, blanched, and freshened up with an end goal to make a satisfactory item that can be offered to buyers. Numerous coconut oils are even hydrogenated or somewhat hydrogenated. However, there are some good quality, non-hydrogenated refined coconut oils that are refined by a synthetic-free cleaning procedure for the most part including steam and additionally diatomaceous earth," says Dr Siddhant Bhargava, fitness and nutritional scientist, co-founder of Food Darzee.

BEAUTY DIARIES

Coconut oil has a long shelf life and numerous benefits. It can be used for anything—breath freshener, makeup brush cleaner, hair mask, lip scrub, and many more. You can also use it for everything from healing scars to moisturising dry skin. "Even the most potent waterproof mascara cannot stand a chance against coconut oil. Apply it directly to your face as an oil cleanser, or let it settle on your skin with a cotton pad to remove makeup. Coconut oil contains antifungal and antibacterial properties. Gargling for nearly 20 minutes with a spoonful of oil helps clear up germs present in the mouth, leading to fresher breath, whiter teeth, and stronger gums. Sweet-smelling coconut oil is filled with fatty acids, making it a perfect moisturiser. This is the real key because it means that the oil makes your skin look more glowing than a lotion. Coconut oil is a fantastic remedy for chapped lips particularly because it remains semisolid at room temperature," says Avni Kaul, nutritionist and wellness coach, founder of NutriActivania. Dr Nirupama Parwanda, dermatologist and founder of Zolie Skin Clinic says, "Coconut oil has been an answer to most skin concerns and otherwise too. It has been used as an after bath oil, as a makeup remover, cuticle cream, hair mask, scar reducing oil and as an overnight used face oil. What makes coconut oil such a versatile beauty ingredient is its excellent moisturising property and also its antibacterial property."

DO IT RIGHT

As coconut oil has a unique flavour, it is healthy to consume it in moderation even though it is higher in saturated fat. Coconut oil is best consumed in small quantity as a periodic alternative to other vegetables oils. "When it comes to choosing the right coconut oil, we must keep in mind that all coconut oils have similar fatty acid profile but virgin coconut oil contains nutrients like Vitamin E and polyphenol. Poly phenols are packed with antioxidants that help to boost the immune system and reduce inflammation in the body. It is better not to use any processed coconut oil," says Emmany D. R., senior clinical dietitian, Narayana Health City, Mazumdar Shaw Medical Centre. It can be used in place for traditional cooking oils such as refined oil and mustard oil and has a similar number of calories per tablespoon as olive, avocado and grapeseed oils. It is usually suggested to stir-fry foods when cooking in coconut oil. If you want to get the best results, then you can go ahead with medium heating of the foods especially vegetables and the foods which require proper attention. Coconut oil has a high smoking point which means it can sustain cooking at high temperature and hence ideal for Indian cooking methods. Dr Deepiti Tejas, HOD-Healthcare, Team Reset says, "The oil's nature of being solid at room temperature makes it useful in baking methods instead of margarine or butter." Although, it is filled with goodness, care must be taken to use it in right proportions as it is high in calories. While consuming coconut in any form, keep a tab on daily overall fat intake. So, get ready to give your diet a coconut twist—it will do you a lot of good. □