

Nutty about.....nut oils?



How nutty are you??

With such a wide variety of **oils** on the supermarket shelf, it can be difficult to make the wisest of choices. In a way there is no "healthiest oil" as each oil offers different benefits and one may be a better choice than another in cooking for example. As nut oils are becoming more popular, here are a few tips to help you decide on what to choose when you go shopping:

Almond Oil

Almond oil is clear, pale yellow and has a slightly nutty flavour. It is used in several interesting recipes and is a good substitute for olive oil as it has a similar high monounsaturated fat content. It is typically used as an ingredient in salad dressings, mayonnaise and sauces, and is often used in desserts. It has a high smoke point so may be used for cooking at high temperatures. *(The 'smoke point' is the temperature at which an oil begins to break down, resulting in decreases in nutritional value as well as the formation of chemical compounds which make the oil smell bad and taste bad. The smoke point of an oil dictates its maximum stable temperature so can be used as a guide to help you decide which oil to use in your cooking e.g. baking at a very high temperature would require an oil with a high smoke point.)*

Walnut Oil

Walnut oil is light in colour and has a delicate, nutty flavor. It is a good source of polyunsaturated fats including essential omega-3 (heart healthy) fats. As walnut oil is relatively pricey, you may want to use this oil selectively. Also, as it has a low smoking point, it is not recommended for cooking at high temperatures. Heating can reduce some of its flavour and nutritional benefits – antioxidants especially, may be easily destroyed in cooking. It is thus more suitable for cold dishes such as salad dressings where its flavour comes through more easily.

Once opened, it should be kept refrigerated to prevent it turning stale quickly. If kept in the fridge, it should keep well for around two to three years (check the label for the "best before" date).

Macadamia Nut Oil

This amber-coloured oil has a delicious, light macadamia nut flavour. Compared to other food oils, it contains one of the highest levels of monounsaturated fat and can be used instead of olive oil when necessary. It has a high smoking point, which makes it ideal for stir-frying, sautéing and baking. It is especially complementary to fish, chicken, vegetables, baked goods and salads.

As macadamia oil is expensive, perhaps consider giving it as a perfect healthy gift to friends who need to lower their cholesterol levels. Macadamia nut oil is very stable as it has a low polyunsaturated fat content. It also has a long shelf life and can be stored for one to two years.

Peanut oil

Peanut (groundnut) oil is a clear, pale yellow oil which has a distinctive nutty taste. It is also a good choice as it has a good monounsaturated fat content. It has a high smoking point, so may be used for cooking at high temperatures. Its peanut flavour is distinctive and it is commonly used in Chinese or Asian cuisine as well for adding flavour and character to salads.

Peanut oil needs to be stored in a tightly closed bottle and stored in a cool, dry and dark place (not in the cupboard just over the stove). Sealed bottles of peanut cooking oil can last up to a year, while the opened bottles of oils will last for 4 to 6 months. Refrigerating peanut oil will help make it last for longer.

What about nut allergies?

Most oils from nuts are considered fairly healthy, but one should avoid using nut oils when serving dishes to people who have nut allergies in case of possible allergic reactions.

What we recommend?

Including healthy unsaturated (good) fats in your diet and cutting down on unhealthy saturated and trans fats is important for **improving** cholesterol levels, **protecting** against the build-up of plaque in your arteries and **lowering** the risk of heart disease and stroke. However, even healthier oils contain a lot of calories, so remember that **moderation is important**. The amount of fat that you can have per day varies according to individual needs. In cooking, a general guideline would be to use one teaspoon of oil per person (equivalent to 5g of fat).

As nut oils are a good source of healthy unsaturated fats, they are great to include in your diet if you can find and afford them. Also, try to vary the source of unsaturated fats in your diet, to include other good options like fresh nuts, seeds, olives, avocados, vegetable oils (e.g. sunflower, canola, olive), products made from vegetable oils (e.g. soft margarines) as well as fatty fish (e.g. sardines, pilchards, tuna, mackerel, herring and salmon).

For cooking at high temperatures, choose oils with a higher smoking point - for nut oils this includes peanut, almond and macadamia oils. Remember that, instead of deep-frying, rather stir-fry, grill or bake foods as these are healthier cooking methods and oil requirements in such dishes are much lower.

When you go shopping remember to look out for our **Heart Mark** approved products.

Have fun and experiment by using various nut oils in new dishes and salads. Go nutty!

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For more heart smart advice and information about Heart Mark Diet Line on 0860 223 222 to speak to one of our dietitians or email heart@heartfoundation.co.za. Visit the Eat Well or Dieticians Corner on our website www.heartfoundation.co.za for further information.