



THE HEART
AND STROKE
FOUNDATION
SOUTH AFRICA

Which oil should you use?

The cooking and salad oil shelves in the supermarket can be confusing and downright intimidating.

Aren't the cheaper ones unhealthy and fattening and the healthy oils more expensive? Can you use the same oil for frying and in salads? And why should you buy olive oil if sunflower and canola are a lot cheaper?

First the good news: the most popular oils - canola, sunflower and olive - are all beneficial and considered healthy because they're derived from plants.

Canola oil

This oil is made from the crushed seeds of the Canola plant.

It has the lowest content of unhealthy, saturated fats compared to other vegetable oils and is high in healthy, unsaturated fats. It's also a source of omega-3 fats and alpha linolenic acid (ALA), which may help to reduce raised triglyceride levels (an unhealthy type of blood fat), and prevent abnormal blood clotting. In this way it helps to cut your risk for heart disease.

Canola is one of the healthiest oils you can use in cooking. It can be heated with very little deterioration and isn't very distinctive in flavour, so it doesn't affect the flavour of other foods.

- Use it for: all cooking processes that require the heating of oil, including stir frying, shallow-frying and sautéing
- Suitable for: dipping or dressings, marinades and salsas

Sunflower oil

This oil is chemically extracted from sunflower seeds, is high in healthy unsaturated fats and low in saturated fats.

Studies have shown that a balanced diet which includes small quantities of sunflower oil has noticeable cholesterol-lowering benefits.

- Use it for: sautéing, shallow-frying, baking and preserving
- Excellent for making mayonnaise
- Suitable for: dressings, marinades and salsas

Olive oil

Olive oil has long been known as one of the healthier oils. Some of its beneficial properties include its healthy, mono-unsaturated fat content and its abundant supply of polyphenols - these are anti-oxidants that may prevent heart disease and stroke and lower blood pressure.

Two processes are used to make olive oil, hence the terms “extra-virgin” and “virgin” oil.

Extra-virgin oils are of higher quality - the olives are processed within 24 hours of picking. For this reason, they contain more antioxidants than the “virgin” oils.

“Pure” olive oil, or just “olive oil”, is heavily processed to remove certain flavours and aromas. Although it’s still a good source of healthy fats, it’s been stripped of its antioxidant content.

The best-tasting olive oils are those that haven’t been refined or subjected to high temperatures during processing.

Because extra-virgin, cold-pressed olive oils are the least processed, they contain higher levels of antioxidants.

Generally, olive oil is rich in mono-unsaturated fats, which can lower “bad” LDL cholesterol levels without lowering “good” HDL levels. It also contains powerful antioxidant compounds which may help to reduce the blood’s tendency to clot, and slow the onset of atherosclerosis. It may also reduce the risk of cancer, as it’s packed with vitamin E, a powerful antioxidant.

Although olive oil can be used in cooking, it’s healthier when used in salads or as a dipping sauce. If you use it in cooking, make sure you heat it at a low or medium temperature to retain the antioxidants.

- Use it for: dressing salads and dipping bread, or light sautéing of onion and garlic
- Not suitable for: shallow-frying, deep-frying, braising and baking

A few last tips:

- Include a variety of mono- and polyunsaturated oils in your diet
- Each kind of oil can contribute to a healthy diet
- Healthier cooking methods are better than deep-frying. Rather steam, stir-fry, grill or bake your food

[Heart Healthy meal from Cooking From The Heart Recipe Book 1](#)



One-pot chicken

Recipe from Marlene Weston
Serves 6

2 tsp (10 ml) sunflower oil

1 large onion, chopped
1 clove of garlic, finely chopped
4 chicken breasts on the bone, halved and skin and all fat removed
2 large carrots, thickly sliced
3 baby marrows, thickly sliced
1 x 410 g tin chopped tomatoes

1 tbsp (15 ml) tomato paste
½ tsp (2,5 ml) paprika or cayenne pepper or to taste
1 tsp (5 ml) dried oregano or 1 tbsp chopped fresh oregano
½ cup (125 ml) water
1 x 410 g tin baked beans in tomato sauce
1 x 410 g tin butter or red kidney beans, drained (optional)
½ tsp (2,5 ml) salt
lemon juice and black pepper to taste
2 tbsp (30 ml) chopped fresh parsley

1. Heat oil in a large pot and fry onion and garlic for a few minutes. Add chicken and fry until golden brown.
2. Add carrots, baby marrows, tomatoes, tomato paste, paprika and oregano.
3. Add water, reduce heat and simmer with a lid for 30 minutes or until the chicken is cooked.
4. Add tins of beans, salt and season with lemon juice and pepper. Heat through and stir in the parsley.
5. Serve on small portions of pap, mealie rice or mashed potatoes.