

# Cooking Oil Facts

As you enter a department store, you behold an array of cooking oils sporting all types of jargon on the packaging -- saturated fats, unsaturated fats, refined, filtered, ricebran oil, *vanaspati*, etc. Confused already? With so much variety and so many brands flooding the market today, buying the right cooking oil can prove a tough task.

Different oils fill different needs - for health, taste and cooking. For good health, our bodies need a variety of healthy fats that are found naturally in different oils. When cooking, it's essential to know which oils are best for baking, sautéing and frying and which are healthiest used raw.

## Why have Oil (fats)?

Contrary to popular belief, fat is actually a valuable part of one's diet, allowing people to absorb nutrients that require fat in order to metabolize in the body. Natural fats contain varying ratios of three types of fats: saturated, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated.

- **Saturated fats** are hard at room temperature. They're stable, resist oxidation, and are found primarily in meat, dairy, palm and coconut oil.
- **Polyunsaturated fats** are liquid at room temperature and the least stable. They oxidize easily and are found in seafood corn, safflower, soybean, and sunflower oils.
- **Monounsaturated fats** are more stable than polyunsaturated fats. They're found in canola, nut and olive oils.

It is recommended to limit saturated fats in the diet due to their association with cardiovascular disease. Also, you should try to rely more on monounsaturated than polyunsaturated fats.

## What are the varieties of Oil available in the market?

Choosing which oil should be used in cooking is a big issue and concern for many people because of the fat and cholesterol contents of cooking oil. Here are some varieties of oils available in the market and their benefits:

- **Almond oil:** Good for eyes, skin and should be used in salads.
- **Sesame oil:** Good for blood pressure, joint pains and cold constitutions.
- **Peanut oil/paste:** Good for growing teenagers, rich in monounsaturated fat.
- **Soya bean oil:** Good for heart and cholesterol patients.
- **Mustard oil:** Good for high cholesterol patients.
- **Rice bran oil:** Good for overweight people and people facing acidity problems.
- **Olive oil:** Great for salads and to sauté veggies, good for overweight people.
- **Safflower oil:** Can be used in baking, frying (avoid if avoidable), rich in poly unsaturated fats, good as one of the 3 oils that should be used at home.
- **Corn oil:** It is a Poly-unsaturated oil, good as one of the 3 oils that should be used at home.
- **Flaxseed oil:** Good for arthritis.

- **Rapeseed oil (canola):** Polyunsaturated oil, made from a non-toxic rapeseed oil (otherwise rapeseed is toxic). Unfortunately, it is not available in India.

### Other sources of Fats:

- **Ghee:** Good for body building or weak people, should also be used in old age for many anti-aging herbal concoctions.
- **Butter:** Great taste, livens up most veggies, dal (pulses) etc but calls for prudent use because they are loaded with saturated fat.
- **Cream, cheese:** They benefit only slim people.

### Which oil is the best?

No single oil is best or worst. Each one should be used by rotation and a minimum of three oils should be used as all of them have certain essential fatty acids needed by the body. Using just one does not meet the requirement. To give an example, one can use seed oil like mustard oil plus fruit oil like olive oil and an animal fat like ghee by rotation.

### How much oil should be used?

There are 3 different types of people:

- **The slim with dry constitutions:** They should use 30 gms of oil and fats per day and the oils should be of the "heating" variety (sesame oil, mustard oil).
- **Acidic acne prone constitutions (pitta people):** They should use 20 gms of oil per day and the oil should be of the "cooling" variety (rice bran oil).
- **The kapha people:** They are the ones most probably reading this article as they have the maximum weight gain tendency. They need 15 to 20 gms of oil and fat and of the "neutral" variety (olive oil).

### Which is the best way to use oils?

Oils, depending upon the cuisine and the food, can be used in different ways:

- **For baking:** Use butter or a vegetable oil (as it has medium smoking point)
- **For sautés:** Use olive oil
- **For salads:** Use nut oil like almond oil or fruit oil like olive oil

Remember; always avoid deep frying as a method of cooking because dangerous Trans-fatty acids are formed which are harmful to health.

### Is ghee good or bad?

Ghee is clarified butter, a saturated fat which forms cholesterol. It is one of the most controversial fats. A lot has been written about the virtues of ghee and it is used extensively in naturopathy. But the catch is that ghee has never been misused as it is being misused today! It is

applied on parathas, it is poured in vegetables, dals, and pooris; that is an absolute dietitians nightmare. These forms of ghee were never endorsed by Ayurveda. Ghee can be used sparingly to the tune of 1 teaspoon a day for flavoring dals (pulses).

Even the healthiest oil can contain a lot of calories so moderation is the key. In general, use non-stick pans and use tissues to soak the excess oil. It will add very little oil to a dish. The healthiest oil used to deep-fry will still be highly caloric. Instead of deep-frying, stir-frying, grilling or baking are better methods for preparing food, since oil requirements in such dishes are much lower.

You more or less have a better understanding of the common classifications of cooking oil now. Probably next time while you are shopping in any supermarket or any shop, try to read the label of different types of cooking oil and see which oil is best for you!

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