

Coconut Oil – Benefits for Mammalian & Avian Physiology

For thousands of years, coconuts have been a staple of tropical cuisines, and those who followed a traditional coconut-based diet, such as Pacific Islanders, had none of the heart disease, cancer, diabetes, or other illnesses that plague modern America.

According to its advocates, when taken internally, coconut oil:

- Reduces the *risk of cancer* and other degenerative conditions
- Improves *cholesterol* levels and helps fight heart disease
- Improves *digestion* and nutrient absorption
- Heals *digestive disorders* like Crohn's disease, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers, and colitis
- Contains *powerful antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal* agents that prevent infection and disease
- Relieves *arthritis*
- Prevents and treats *yeast and fungal* infections, including thrush and candidiasis
- Prevents and treats *viral infections*, including herpes, measles, and the flu
- Helps balance the body's *metabolism and hormones*
- Promotes normal *thyroid function*
- Helps prevent or control *diabetes*
- Rejuvenates the skin *and protects against skin cancer*, age spots, acne, and other blemishes
- Helps prevent *osteoporosis*
- Reduces *allergic reactions*
- Supplies *fewer calories* than other fats.

Applied topically, its boosters say that coconut oil also does the following:

- *Disinfects cuts*
- Promotes wound *healing*
- Improves *skin health* and hair condition
- *Deodorizes* whatever it touches (some people brush their teeth with it or use it as an underarm deodorant)
- *Clears up skin conditions* like warts, moles, psoriasis, eczema, dandruff, precancerous lesions, athlete's foot, jock itch, diaper rash, ringworm, vaginal yeast infections, and toenail fungus.

All of this is excellent news for people and their pets, for most of coconut oil's human benefits are shared by animals. And they love the taste, which makes feeding coconut oil and other coconut products easy and pleasant.

Medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs)

Most of coconut oil's health benefits come from medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs), also known as medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs). According to former University of Maryland biochemist and dietary fats researcher Mary Enig, PhD, "The lauric acid in coconut oil is used by the body to make the same disease-fighting fatty acid derivative monolaurin that babies make from the lauric acid they get from their mothers' milk. The monoglyceride monolaurin is the substance that keeps infants from getting viral, bacterial, or protozoal infections."

Coconut oil's capric and caprylic acid have similar properties and are best known for their antifungal effects. Like lauric acid, capric acid helps balance insulin levels.

In addition to protecting the body against infection, medium-chain fatty acids are efficiently metabolized to provide an immediate source of fuel and energy, enhancing athletic performance and aiding weight loss. In fact, several coconut diet books are now in print.

"The energy boost you get from coconut oil is not like the kick you get from caffeine," says Dr. Fife. "It gently elevates the metabolism, provides a higher level of energy and vitality, protects you from illness, and speeds healing. In dogs, the medium-chain fatty acids in coconut oil balance the thyroid, helping overweight dogs lose weight and helping sedentary dogs feel energetic. As a bonus, coconut oil improves any dog's skin and coat, improves digestion, and reduces allergic reactions."

During the last few decades, extensive research on medium-chain fatty acids has documented their health benefits, and many supplements and health foods contain MCFAs or MCTs. You'll find them listed that way on their labels – but their source, which isn't listed, is always coconut oil. "We've become so phobic about coconut oil," says Dr. Fife, "that manufacturers who appreciate its benefits have been smuggling it into all kinds of products. Start reading labels and you'll be surprised at all the MCFAs and MCTs. Those abbreviations always mean coconut oil."

How long have people been consuming coconut oil?

Coconut oil is an edible oil that has been consumed in tropical places for thousands of years. Studies done on native diets high in coconut consumption show that these populations are generally in good health, and don't suffer as much from many of the modern diseases of western nations.

Coconut oil was once prevalent in western countries like the United States as well. With a long shelf life and a melting point of only 76 degrees, it was a favorite in the baking industry. But a negative campaign against saturated fats in general, and the tropical oils in particular, led to most food manufacturers abandoning coconut oil in recent years in favor of hydrogenated polyunsaturated oils that come from the main cash crops in the US, particularly soy, and contain trans fatty acids. These polyunsaturated oils were not a big part of the diet of previous generations, so how has the health of Americans changed now that polyunsaturated oils are for the most part all one finds on supermarket shelves across the US?

Other favorable oils for birds:

- Borage oil
- Primrose oil
- Hemp oil
- Flax oil
- Red palm oil



Oils are typically available in organic form and are usually available in the refrigerated section of health food stores.

Credit: the Whole Dog Journal