

11 reasons why you should be using extra virgin olive oil



The Bible refers to the olive tree as the “tree of life.” Olives, the ripe fruit of the tree, yield healthy monounsaturated fats and phytochemicals that act as potent antioxidants. Research on the benefits of olive oil abounds in scientific literature.

It’s long been established that the Mediterranean Diet, rich in unrefined olive oil, confers major cardiovascular benefits. While it’s been thought that the monounsaturated fats in olive oil were responsible, new research suggests that it’s not just the oil itself, but what’s IN the oil that protects the circulatory system.

It was the erroneous belief that the benefits of olive oil were attributable to its high oleic acid content that led to the popularization of Canola oil as a cheap alternative. But Canola is highly refined, GMO, and bereft of the healthy polyphenols that authentic, high quality olive oil delivers. ✘

Good quality, extra-virgin olive oil has a fruity aroma and a greenish tint, the signature for its rich content of compounds like oleuropein and hydroxytyrosol.

There’s concern over vitiation and outright counterfeiting of much of the olive oil supply for sale in the U.S. Lack of certification and quality control are rife, and entire criminal enterprises are based on cutting corners. The American consumer is an easy mark for this deception, because most U.S. palates are unused to the strong taste and aroma of authentic olive oil—they prefer blandness. And shoppers gravitate toward bargains with improbable prices.

Here are 11 reasons why you should be using genuine extra virgin olive oil on your salads and in your cooking:

1) Olive oil is more stable and healthful than seed oils for frying food. Different oils exhibit variable stability when subject to heating. Researchers deep- and pan-fried potatoes in 4 different oils: olive, corn, soybean, and sunflower. After reusing the oils up to 10 times, they found that olive oil was least subject to chemical alteration and especially resistant to generation of dangerous lipid peroxides. Of course, it’s not advisable to overuse olive oil for high-temperature frying because there will be inevitable damage to its polyphenol content. Saturated fats like ghee, lard and coconut oil hold up best to high-temperature cooking because of their highly stable chemical bonds.

2) Olive oil makes you feel full. Researchers investigated the satiety effects of four different edible fats and oils: Lard, butterfat, rapeseed (canola) oil and olive oil. They fed volunteers yogurt laced with 500 grams of each of the four lipid sources. The research subjects found the yogurt with olive oil most filling.

3) A diet rich in olive oil doesn’t make you gain weight. In the aforementioned

study, none of the participants consuming olive oil gained weight. Olive oil is a key constituent of the Mediterranean diet, which has proven benefits for weight optimization. **Studies show that**, despite consuming a high percentage of fat calories from olive oil, subjects remain lean.

4) Olive oil may protect against stroke. Large studies involving thousands of individuals have shown that a high intake of olive oil is associated with lower risk of stroke. It's the phenolic content of olive oil that's responsible for optimizing blood pressure, because refined olive oil doesn't deliver the same benefits as unrefined.

5) Olive oil may protect against heart disease. As might be expected, olive oil's arterial protection translates to reduced risk of heart disease as well as stroke. The heart-healthy Mediterranean diet is most beneficial when it includes a high content of olive oil. For each 10 gram per day increase in extra-virgin olive oil consumption, cardiovascular disease and mortality risk decreased by 10% and 7%, respectively. A Mediterranean diet rich in olive oil has also been shown to boost levels of "good" HDL cholesterol.

6) Olive oil is anti-inflammatory. Olive oil is rich in antioxidants that quench free radicals responsible for inflammation. These include oleic acid and the phytonutrient oleocanthal. The anti-inflammatory effects of olive oil may be responsible for the fact that trials of fish oil vs. rheumatoid arthritis have come up short when researchers used olive oil capsules as a supposedly "inert" placebo.

7) Olive oil may combat cancer. Heart-healthy oleocanthal has been shown to be a powerful inhibitor of cancer cells. A Mediterranean diet plus olive oil is associated with reduced breast cancer risk.

8) Olive oil has antibacterial properties. A compound in olive oil, oleuropein, has been found to have potent antibacterial, antifungal and antiviral effects. **Studies confirm** that it strongly inhibits *H. pylori*, the bacterium responsible for many cases of ulcer and stomach cancer.

9) Olive oil may reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes. Research has underscored olive oil's efficacy in combatting elevated glucose and insulin resistance. **A recent study showed** that a Mediterranean diet rich in olive oil lowered the risk of diabetes by 40%.

10) Olive oil may prevent dementia and Alzheimer's Disease. The antioxidants in olive oil are strongly neuroprotective. Oleocanthal has been found to inhibit the deposition of amyloid beta—the compound responsible for neurofibrillary tangles that characterize Alzheimer's—in the brain.

11) Olive oil improves your absorption of critical nutrients in vegetables. Think that low-fat dressing will extend your longevity? Think again! It turns out that fat-soluble vitamins like A, D, E and K and nutrients like lycopene, lutein, beta carotene are best absorbed with fat. Which makes it a good idea to use olive oil as dressing on your salad, for sautéing your veggies, and as an ingredient in your tomato sauce or pesto.

I hope these reasons have given you a whole new appreciation for the value of high-quality olive oil in a healthy diet. I encourage you to seek out olive oils that are pure and whose quality is vetted – they may cost a few more dollars, but I assure you, the benefits are well worth the added cost!

