

# Healthiest Oils to use for Cooking

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When one visits the super-markets today, one finds it confusing to choose a cooking oil of your choice, as there are so many to select from. In the past, especially coconut oil seemed to be the most popular oil used for Asian cuisines, and for special occasions, butter and ghee were the other fats that were used predominantly.

All cooking oils are either saturated like butter, coconut, and animal oils (tallow, lard and others), or the unsaturated ones like olive, peanut nut, vegetable, canola oils and margarine, among others.

The healthiest oil to cook with is one that is composed primarily of mono or poly unsaturated oils. Oils containing high degree saturated fats, except coconut oil, are considered the least healthy because they are used as raw products in the synthesis of cholesterol in the liver, which can cause increased lipid content in the blood, resulting in increased risk of atherosclerosis and heart disease. Further these saturated oils are stored as triglycerides in the fat cells (lipocytes) generally found distributed in the body from under the skin (subcutaneous), to various organs, resulting in obesity which itself being a risk factor for many chronic diseases. Butter though saturated is considered healthier cooking oil than margarine.

Contrary to popular belief, fat is a valuable part of one's diet. At least 30 percent of the calories required per day are produced from fats and about 10 percent of which are derived from the saturated fats. Fats allow people to absorb nutrients such as fat soluble vitamins and others. Of course, unsaturated fats are better healthy choices than saturated fats for absorption of these nutrients.

**Canola oil**, commonly derived from a rapeseed oil from plants specially bred to be low in *erucic acid*, which imparts an unfavourable taste and cause health problems. It is available in liquid form and spray, is a healthy choice for most types of cooking. In Canada it is the most popular healthy oil used for cooking. After all, Canola stands for "Canada Oil", and is very popular in the Western countries. The only drawback of canola oil is that it may not respond to very high temperatures, as coconut and peanut oils.

In the Western world Canola oil is considered as the healthiest of all popular cooking oils, and credited to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease in humans. This is based on the high monounsaturated fat content and its low percentage of saturated fats. Canola being a polyunsaturated fat is high in omega-3 fatty acids which are considered heart healthy.

Most oils from nuts are considered very healthy, but one has to be cautious that walnut and peanut oils may cause severe allergies. When cooking for visitors with peanut oil always check with them for any specific allergy to peanuts.

**Olive oil** is considered as one of the best oils, and mainly used in the Mediterranean countries for salads and sandwiches. It is mainly a monounsaturated fat but contains some poly unsaturated fat also. One should always use the least processed oil-labelled virgin olive oil which seems to be the healthier than other grades. The first lot of olive oil is cold pressed with no additives added and at room temperature. Olive oil is fattening due to the high percentage of oleic acid (60%).

**Sunflower and safflower oil** are higher in polyunsaturated fats but also have omega-6 fatty acids, which now recommended and quite popular in the fish and chips take away food outlets. They are quite healthy for normal cooking. Safflower oil also has a high content of vitamin E, which may consider very healthy. They have a high cooking temperature and do not smoke when continuously used for frying chips and fish.

**Peanut Oil:** Most people use peanut oil for high temperature cooking as used in Chinese cooking, and canola or olive oil for medium cooking. In U.K. it is called ground nut oil, and is popular for deep frying, and it is known for its high smoke point, the point at which the oil begins to give off smoke and start to burn. The smoke point of the refined peanut oil you buy from the supermarket is 450 deg.F (232.22C). Other oils comparable to peanut oil are ghee, sesame oil, refined safflower, extra light olive oil, and coconut oil. No wonder these oils are popular among the Sri Lankan and Indian kitchens.

A tablespoon of peanut oil has just less than 120 calories. One tablespoon provides 21% of the daily recommended intake of total fats, has 2.28 grams of saturated fat, 4.32 grams of polyunsaturated fat and 6.24 grams of monounsaturated fats.

From a nutritional standpoint, many oils are considered superior to peanut oil, but peanut oil because of its flavour and rich taste, remains a popular choice, especially for frying food... In salad dressing it could be very delicious.

Sesame oil: also called gingelly oil or til oil is derived from a sesame seeds. It is used mainly as a condiment to add flavour to food. It is used as massage oil and in worship.

There are two main varieties of oil. Cold press sesame oil is oil that is pressed from raw sesame seeds. It is light in colour and has a mild flavour. Then, there is the toasted oil which is pressed from toasted sesame seeds. Toasting gives darker coloured oil and is nuttier in flavour. Light sesame oil is used in cooking, but not popular in Sri Lanka. The toasted seeds are used mixed with juggary, referred in Sri Lanka as, "thalaguli". No body misses to buy a bag of thalaguli on the Kandy Colombo road at Ambepussa.

Sesame seed oil is full of antioxidants, and does not go rancid as many other oils. It has a high smoke point and well tolerated in deep frying. Toasted sesame oil because of its low smoke point is not used in cooking. It is more suitable as a condiment.

Sesame oil has both mono and polyunsaturated fatty acids and helps to reduce cholesterol and heart friendly. Research shows that it lowers high blood pressure. It has two antioxidants- *sesamol* and *sesamin*. The oil also contains vitamin E and B complex which helps skin to look healthier. It moisturises the dry skins, and used to treat psoriasis and eczema. Some people use the oil for scalp massaging as they believe that the oil rejuvenates the hair.

There is nothing called the best oil in terms of the flavours and tastes among cooking oils. Every house wife knows and needs to keep an armamentarium of all oils and it is best to store them in the fridge away from light.