



Coconut Oil and the Boost in HDL “Good” Cholesterol

The effects of coconut oil were compared to butter and tallow. Even if virgin coconut oil and other saturated fats raise LDL “bad” cholesterol, isn’t that countered by the increase in HDL “good” cholesterol?

According to “the experience and wisdom of 200 of the country’s leading experts in cardiovascular diseases,” in a report representing 29 national medical organizations, including the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology, we’ve known for nearly half a century that “coconut oil is one of the most potent agents for elevating [blood] serum cholesterol level.” Studies showing coconut oil elevates cholesterol date back to 1955, when it was first shown experimentally that switching someone from coconut oil to soybean oil could drop cholesterol from around 200 down to 150.

Coconut oil can significantly raise cholesterol levels within hours of consumption. In fact, a significant increase in blood cholesterol was found within hours of eating a slice of cake made from either coconut oil (or cod liver oil for that matter), but not from the same cake made from flaxseed oil.

Coconut oil may even be worse than tallow, or beef fat, but it is not as bad as butter. An interventional trial was published in March 2017: a month-long randomized, controlled, crossover study looking at the impact of two tablespoons per day of virgin coconut oil. The result? Coconut oil elevated cholesterol about 14 percent over the control, which was consistent with seven other interventional trials published to date in a 2016 review.

Hold on. Saturated fats can make HDL, the so-called good cholesterol, go up, so what’s the problem? The problem is that it doesn’t seem to help. Having a high blood HDL level is “no longer regarded as protective.” What? Wait a second. Higher HDL levels are clearly associated with lower risk of heart disease. In fact, HDL levels “are among the most consistent and robust predictors of CVD [cardiovascular disease]

*“Start
making
healthy
choices.*

*Not just
healthy
choices for
your body,
but also for
your mind.”*

healthbites

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Salt

nutritionfacts.org

Salt is a compound made up of about 40 percent sodium and 60 percent chloride. Sodium is an essential nutrient, but vegetables and other natural foods provide the small amounts of sodium you need in your diet. If you consume too much, it can cause water retention, and your body may respond by raising your blood pressure to push the excess fluid and salt out of your system.

Flax Seeds

nutritionfacts.org

Flax seeds, known as one of the richest sources of essential omega-3 fatty acids and having around one hundred times more cancer-fighting lignans than other foods, have also been demonstrated to prove helpful against breast and prostate cancers; controlling cholesterol, triglyceride, and blood sugar levels; reducing inflammation; and successfully treating constipation.

Antioxidants

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You can tell whether a food is rich in antioxidants by slicing it open, exposing it to air (oxygen), and then seeing what happens. If it turns brown, it's oxidizing. Two of our most popular fruits, apples and bananas, for example, turn brown quickly, which means there aren't a lot of antioxidants inside them. (Most of the antioxidants in apples are in the peels.) Cut open a mango and what happens? Nothing, because it's rich with antioxidants. How do you keep fruit salad from turning brown? Add lemon juice, which contains the antioxidant vitamin C. Antioxidants can keep your food from oxidizing, and they may do the same inside your body.

Inflammation

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Inflammation may play a role in premature aging, periodontal disease, obesity, skin aging, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, cancer, irritable bowel syndrome, and inflammatory bowel diseases, such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, among many other chronic health concerns.

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risk." Ah, but there are two types of risk factors: causal and non-causal. Association does not mean causation—that is, just because two things are tightly linked, it doesn't mean one causes the other.

Let me give you an example. I bet that the number of ashtrays someone owns is an excellent predictor of lung cancer risk and that study after study would show that link. But, that does not mean that if you intervene and lower the number of ashtrays someone has, their lung cancer risk will drop, because it's not the ashtrays that are causing the cancer, but the smoking. The ashtrays are just a marker of smoking, an indicator of smoking, as opposed to playing a causal role in the disease. So, just like having a high number of running shoes and gym shorts might predict a lower risk of heart attack, having a high HDL also predicts a lower risk of heart attack. But, raising HDL, just like raising the number of gym shorts, wouldn't necessarily affect disease risk. How do you differentiate between causal and non-causal risk factors? You put them to the test. The reason we know LDL cholesterol truly is bad is because people who were just born with genetically low LDL cholesterol end up having a low risk of heart disease. And, if you intervene and actively lower people's LDL through diet or drugs, their heart disease risk drops—but not so with HDL.

People who live their whole lives with high HDL levels don't appear to have a lower risk of heart attack, and if you give people a drug that increases their HDL, it doesn't help. That's why we used to give people high-dose niacin—to raise their HDL. But, it's "time to face facts." The "lack of benefit of raising the HDL cholesterol level with the use of niacin...seriously undermine[s] the hypothesis that HDL cholesterol is a causal risk factor." In simple terms: "High HDL may not protect the heart." We should concentrate on lowering LDL. So, specifically, as this relates to coconut oil, the increase in HDL "is of uncertain clinical relevance," but the increase in LDL you get from eating coconut oil "would be expected to have an adverse effect" on atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease risk.

Written By Michael Greger M.D. FACLM on January 28th, 2021



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Company Walnut Loaf

Ingredients:

1c. walnuts, chopped	2 ½c. cooked rice
1c. nut or soy milk	½c. sunflower seeds
1c. seasoned breadcrumbs	½c. fresh parsley, chopped
2T. wholemeal flour	salt to taste
1. medium onion, chopped	

Method:

Combine all ingredients in mixing bowl.
Pack lightly in prepared loaf tin.
Bake at 180°C for 1 hour.

Good for sandwiches. freezes well

—Ref. NZ Vegetarian Favourites, p.31

