

myths busted

with Catherine Saxelby,
HFG Nutrition Director



Is olive oil the *best oil?*

HFG Nutrition Director Catherine Saxelby goes in search of the best oils to keep in your kitchen.

It's no secret that olive oil has won its way into Australian kitchens. But is it the ultimate oil above all others? Not necessarily.

Olive oil's good points

Olive oil is a marvellous choice for health and nutrition. It has one of the richest levels of monounsaturated fats, with only 15 per cent of the 'bad' saturated fats. It has less than 10 per cent polyunsaturated fats, which means it has great 'stability', so it's less likely to oxidise (go off). And it makes vegetables, salads and seafood taste fantastic!

When is it best?

When nutritionists refer to olive oil's role in the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet, they're referring to a specific type of olive

oil: cold-pressed, extra virgin olive oil, which is produced from the first pressing of the olives without any heat or solvent refining. Extra virgin olive oil possesses a distinctive aroma and taste, is low in acidity, is rich in a host of antioxidants and research has shown it plays a role in reducing the risk of heart disease. But don't confuse extra virgin olive oil with the 'virgin' variety – virgin olive oil is of lesser quality, so it may not be as good for you. Extra virgin olive oil is often more expensive, but it's worth it to make salad dressings sing and to splash over grilled vegies. I just wouldn't recommend it for certain types of cooking.

Turn up the heat

Like all unrefined oils, extra virgin olive oil has a low smoke

point (the temperature at which a cooking oil starts to smoke and break down, potentially contributing to the risk of cancer) of only around 160–200°C, so it's not ideal for high-temperature cooking methods like stir-frying and sautéing. Avocado oil (at 270°C), safflower oil (at 266°C) or rice bran oil (255°C) are all better choices for this, and they also offer additional health benefits as well.

If you want to cook with olive oil or olive oil spray, then there are two options: 'pure' olive oil (which has a higher smoke point of 238°C), and 'light' olive oil (with a smoke point of 242°C). But pure olive oil may not have as many antioxidants, as it's been refined, and light olive oil is a lower quality oil that may have been bleached or deodorised to

remove any greenish colour and strong flavour. In other words: you can still use it for cooking, but unless you're looking for that subtle olive flavour, it's worthwhile to look at other types of oil.

Most nutritious?

There are certainly some fantastic benefits to including olive oil in your diet, but don't limit yourself! Olive oil lacks omega-3, which you can find in high levels in flaxseed oil (it contains 55 per cent omega-3) and in walnut and soybean oils (8–10 per cent). It also has little or no vitamin E, a major nutrient that we usually get from oils and fats. Sunflower, safflower or corn oils are the richest in vitamin E.

Bottom line: Olive oil is definitely worth having in your kitchen, especially extra virgin olive oil, for cold use, but you should consider keeping something else on hand for cooking – such as avocado, safflower or rice bran oil.

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Catherine's New Year's resolution is to get organised in the kitchen with a weekly meal plan and shopping list.