

Oil Change...

Bring Home the Good Fats

The best fats are those high in heart-healthy monounsaturates and other important nutrients such as oleic acids and omega-3 fatty acids. But you can't use the healthiest oils for every purpose. Choosing the right healthy oil often depends on its smoke point, the stage at which heated fat begins to emit smoke and acrid, flavor-altering odors. Generally speaking, the higher an oil's smoke point, the better it is for high-heat cooking. Here are the best oils for different purposes.

For Dressings and Drizzling

Extra-virgin olive oil: Olive oil is the healthiest oil you can buy, as it contains the highest monounsaturate content. Extra-virgin is the oil that results from the first cold pressing of the olives. Being the purest olive oil, it's also the most expensive. But because it has a low smoke point, it should not be used for cooking.

For Sautéing

Virgin olive oil: This is also the result of the first pressing of the olives, but it is more acidic and the flavor is less robust. Always choose cold-pressed. Most mass-produced varieties are extracted with chemical solvents. Use for cooking foods at low and medium temperatures.

Safflower oil: Choose the high-oleic version of this light, neutral-flavored oil. It's high in monounsaturates and has a high smoke point.

For High-Heat Cooking

Light olive oil: "Light" refers to the oil's color and taste, not its calorie content. It has the same amount of beneficial monounsaturated fat as regular olive oil has. Because of an extremely fine filtration process, it has little of the olive oil taste and fragrance and a higher smoke point, making it a good choice for baking and high-heat cooking. It's usually a combination of refined virgin olive oils.

Canola oil: After olive and sunflower oil, canola is the next highest in heart-healthy monounsaturated fats. It can be used as a salad dressing, for baking, and frying. This neutral-tasting oil is obtained from rapeseed, a mustard relative. Because rapeseed is commonly sprayed with pesticides, be sure to look for organic, expeller-pressed brands of canola oil.

Peanut oil: An all-purpose oil that's high in monounsaturated fats, peanut oil is also about 30 percent polyunsaturated fats and 20 percent saturated. Because it has a high smoke point, it's prized for frying. Most commercial brands are chemically processed, though expeller-pressed brands are available at specialty stores and online. Peanut oil has a longer shelf life than other oils.

Sesame oil: Although this oil is high in polyunsaturates, its strong flavor means a little goes a long way. For Asian cooking, it's a must. Choose dark for seasoning and light for frying.

Avocado oil: This light-tasting oil is not only high in monounsaturated fats, but can also withstand high-heat cooking.

Grapeseed oil: Although grapeseed oil is high in mono- and polyunsaturates, it has a high smoke point and is often used as a substitute for olive oil.

Sunflower oil: This mild-flavored oil is high in vitamin E. As with safflower oil, look for the high-oleic version, since it's 80 percent monounsaturated and has a high smoke point.