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The Canola Oil spill

Fat is vital! Yes, everyone needs some fat in their daily diet for various reasons – it is an important source of energy, forms part of cell membranes required for the production of certain hormones and also aids the body in the absorption of fat soluble vitamins (A, D, E and K)...So why the big hype around limiting fats in the diet and what is its link to cardiovascular disease? What role does *Canola oil* play in the diet, is it a healthy fat and more importantly, is it safe for us to include in the diet? You might have a few unanswered questions or doubts, so we have attempted to provide you with some insight to put you mind at ease.

Fats and their effects on cardiovascular health:

There are different types of fat in the diet – healthy and unhealthy. Unhealthy fats are not recommended as these have a nasty cholesterol-raising effect, increasing ones risk for heart disease. These should therefore be limited or eliminated from the diet where possible. Unhealthy fats include saturated fat (visible fat on meats, skin on chicken, full cream dairy products, butter, lard, brick margarine, coffee creamers, tea whiteners, palm kernel and palm oil and coconut) and trans fats (commercially prepared biscuits, cakes, crackers, potato crisps, deep fried foods, brick margarines, some soft tub margarines and foods that contain partially hydrogenated oils).

It is well documented that healthy fats like mono and polyunsaturated (especially omega 3 and 6) fats, exert a cardio-protective effect by reducing high cholesterol levels and omega 3 particularly in preventing abnormal blood clotting. These omega 3 and 6 fats are known as essential fats as the body does not produce them naturally – hence these sources need to be acquired through the diet.

Canola oil and its role in heart health:

Canola oil is a refined vegetable oil made from the crushed seeds of the canola plant. It contains a high content of unsaturated fat (approximately 93% - mono and polyunsaturated) and low saturated fats (7%) compared to other vegetable oils. It also contains a source of omega 3 fats, (alpha linolenic acid or ALA) which exert beneficial effects of reducing elevated triglyceride levels and preventing abnormal blood clotting. The ratio of omega 6 to omega 3 in the diet also plays a role in achieving optimal health and well being. Whilst most people consume westernised diets attaining more omega 6 than omega 3 fats, *Canola oil* boasts an excellent omega 6: omega 3 ratio of 2:1, so helps improve the intake of some omega 3 fats as well.

Is it safe to include in your diet?

Most definitely! This oil was previously rumoured, to exhibit many negative health benefits including being 'poisonous' because it is made from the rape seed, causing blindness and deterioration of the nervous system, causing mad cow disease, to name just a few of these ridiculous claims! Shân Biesmon-Simons, director for Nutrition and Education at the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA states that: *'eating wisely is about including foods from all the food groups and making the better choices from those groups. Canola oil is one of the healthy unsaturated fats and can play a role in a heart healthy diet.'*

So there you go - the next time you go shopping, remember to include this oil in your trolley!

Cold pressed vs. refined? Is there a difference?

Cold pressed oils are subjected to a different processing technique compared to refined oils. However, there is no difference in their fatty acid profiles so whichever you use, you are likely to get the cardiovascular benefit. The refining process is merely to remove any odours and impurities such as, free fatty acids and phospholipids, mucilaginous gums, colour pigments and fine meal particles. The only major nutritional difference evident from the two different techniques is that during the refining process; some of the vitamin E content is removed.



Cooking with *Canola*

Canola oil can be used for cooking at high temperatures as it has a high smoking point (the point at which an oil is heated producing an unpleasant smell and taste as well as compromising nutritional quality). Oils that have a low smoking point are for example olive oil and hence these should be used preferably in foods that require cooking at low temperatures or in foods that can be eaten cold (salad dressings).

Did you know....when a recipe calls for the use of a hard brick margarine, you can replace it with canola oil? Here's how:

Hard fat	<i>Canola oil</i>
¼ cup (50ml)	3½ tablespoons(42ml)
½ cup (125ml)	7 tablespoons(100ml)
¾ cup (175ml)	10 tablespoons(140ml)
1 cup (250ml)	13 ½ tablespoons(200ml)

How should it be stored?

Preferably in a cool, dark place or the fridge when not in use, as exposure to light can tend to accelerate the degeneration process of the oil.

Interesting *Canola oil* facts at a glance:

- Has a high amount of unsaturated fats (approximately 93%)
- Has a low content of saturated fats (approximately 7%)
- Can be used in cooking, due to its high smoking point as well as in 'cold' foods (dressings and dips)
- Contains omega 3 fats (approximately 11%)
- Healthy omega 6:omega 3 ratio of 2 to 1
- Approved by the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA (holds the Heart Mark)
- Approved by the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA)

What does the HSFSA recommend?

A little bit of a good thing can be healthy but too much is not necessarily better! Fats should be included in the diet in moderation with emphasis placed on limiting total fat intake and replacing unhealthy saturated and trans fats with healthy unsaturated ones wherever possible. Also, vary the source of your unsaturated fats and oils as all types contribute in some way to a heart healthy diet. Other vegetable oils that can be included are olive, sunflower, almond, sesame, peanut, soyabean and flaxseed. Bear in mind though that whichever oil you choose, all have the same amount of calories so don't be too generous with it!

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For more heart smart advice, call our Heart Mark Diet Line on 0860 223 222 to speak to one of our dietitians or email heart@heartfoundation.co.za . See our website www.heartfoundation.co.za for further information.

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