



the good oil

Olives—and their oil—have been used since biblical times. But their popularity in modern society surged after it was found that it's possible to eat a high-fat diet and still have a low risk of heart disease, so long as you use the right fat to flavor a lot of plant foods, such as in the Mediterranean diet.

The Seven Countries Study showed that while 40 percent of the calories consumed in Crete (Greece) were from fat, the incidence of heart disease was one-thirtieth the incidence in Finland, which had a similar level of fat intake! The difference? The Cretans doused their food in olive oil, whereas the fat in Finnish diets came predominantly from animal sources.

choosing a good oil

There are many interesting flavors—fruity, peppery, buttery—but the best kinds to buy are cold pressed, extra virgin olive oils, in a dark bottle or can. These contain more than 45 different phytonutrients with antioxidant properties, now thought to be the main reason olive oil is linked with less heart disease and breast cancer.

“Extra virgin” and “virgin” olive oils contain the highest content, whereas “olive oil” and “light olive oil” contain little or no phytonutrients, as they've been removed by processing. That's why they have a lighter color and flavor. Light olive oils are not lower in

calories, as is commonly believed.

“Cold pressed” means no—or little—heat treatment has been used to extract the oil from the fruit, so there are no chemical changes to the oil.

using and storing it

To get more antioxidants, use extra virgin olive oil raw to flavor salads, or drizzle on steamed vegetables, such as asparagus or endive (Greeks also add lemon juice).

You can cook with olive oil, but studies show that the higher the temperature and the longer the cooking time, the more antioxidants you lose. Stewing is better than shallow frying, especially over extended periods. If you choose to deep fry, extra virgin olive oil is more stable, as it has a high oleic acid content, and the antioxidants retard the harmful changes that occur when polyunsaturated vegetable oils are used.

Store your oil in a dark cupboard, as exposure to light or heat destroys the antioxidants and hastens rancidity.

Nutritionist Sue Radd is the award-winning author of *The Breakfast Book* and coauthor of *Eat To Live*, internationally acclaimed for showing how savvy eating can combat cancer and heart disease and improve well-being. See the latest at <http://www.sueradd.com>.