

Olive Oil

Brought to you by Froedtert Hospital Dietitians

Research suggests that cooking with olive oil can be beneficial to your health. But why is olive oil healthful?

Compared with vegetable oils, olive oil has far more monounsaturated fat (the good kind). That's the key. Monounsaturated fats may lower total and LDL (bad) cholesterol in blood and perhaps raise HDL (good) cholesterol.

The question then becomes which type of olive oil to use?

Pure olive oil: Since cooking causes all grades of olive oil to lose flavor, it may be more cost effective to use olive oil for cooking rather than more expensive virgin or extra virgin varieties. Pure olive oil is able to withstand higher cooking temperatures while retaining all of its heart healthy properties.

Virgin olive oil: Virgin olive oil is very versatile. It has a great taste and is often less expensive than extra virgin varieties. Use virgin olive oil as a condiment or as an addition to cooked dishes before serving. Because virgin olive oil is an excellent cooking medium, it can be used for sautéing, pan-frying, or broiling.

Extra virgin olive oil: This oil is lower in acid which results in a fruity flavor and aroma so you don't need to use as much to enjoy the flavor. Cooking with high heat does not change the basic properties of olive oil, but it causes olive oil to lose some of its flavor. Because of this, it may be best to use expensive, flavorful, extra virgin olive oil for dishes that are not cooked or as a last minute addition to cooked dishes just before serving. Use it in salad dressings, in marinades, or add it to sauces. Drizzle it over slices of crusty bread or onto open-face sandwiches. Use it on a baked potato or add it to mashed potatoes instead of butter. Extra virgin olive oil tastes great on cooked vegetables or brushed onto fish or meat before serving.

Storage Containers

Although it can get rancid, olive oil is less likely to become rancid than other oils, especially if it is stored properly. The best containers for storage are glass (especially tinted glass), ceramic, porcelain, or non-reactive metals such as stainless steel.

Do not store olive oil in containers made of reactive metals such as copper or iron. The chemical reaction between the olive oil and the metal will damage the oil and may produce toxins. Olive oil should not be stored in plastic containers because the oil may absorb PVC's from the plastic.

Storage for Olive Oil

It is important to store olive oil in a cool, dark place. Keep it in a cabinet located away from the stove and away from direct sunlight.

Refrigeration will extend the life of olive oil without harming the oil. The oil will become cloudy and solidify in the refrigerator, but this will not significantly affect the quality or flavor. When the oil is warmed to room temperature it will return to a liquid state and its color will be restored. Refrigeration does not harm most grades of olive oil, but it is not recommended for expensive extra virgin varieties because condensation may develop in the bottle, affecting the flavor.

Olive can be kept for up to 15 months if it is properly stored. If it is stored in its original container and remains unopened, it should last for 2 years or more.

As olive oil ages, it continually degrades and the acidity level rises. As a result, an older bottle of olive oil may have an unpleasant odor and taste. These are signs that it is time to buy a new bottle.

Tip adapted from Hormel.com and foodnetwork.com