



## GOOD FOOD

Friday, October 18, 2013

# Coconut oil: The food both vegans and Paleo eaters are obsessed with

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(Photo: Elanaspantry.com)

Talk to some people and you may come away believing that adding coconut oil to your diet will turn you into a superhuman braniac immortal stud. The previously maligned oil is having a moment in the nutrition spotlight (and that's on top of its reputation as an [uber multitasking beauty product](#) and a [dental health heavyweight](#).)

It's flying off the shelves at health food stores thanks in part to the fact that two polar-opposite but equally popular types of eaters are loving it: vegans and Paleos. Both avoid butter (something they can agree on!), and [coconut oil is the perfect substitute](#).

So should you add it to your diet? Scientists, physicians, and nutritionists are not in agreement about whether there's enough evidence to support downing it daily, but we tapped top New York nutritionist



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Sharon Richter, R.D. to walk you through some of the purported nutritional benefits:

### Good fat?

Coconut oil's fat content—it's packed with lauric acid, a fatty acid made of medium chain triglycerides, or MCTs—is the centerpiece of why experts love (or hate) it. So if you just finished internalizing the “fat doesn't make you fat” mantra in order to embrace omega 3s, get ready for another fat that wants your blessing. While lauric acid is saturated fat, not all saturated fats are the same, Richter says. “Saturated fats mostly come from animal products,” she says, which are made up of long-chain fatty acids known for artery-clogging. Lauric acid is metabolized faster in the body, and some small studies have shown it has positive effects on individuals' cholesterol levels.

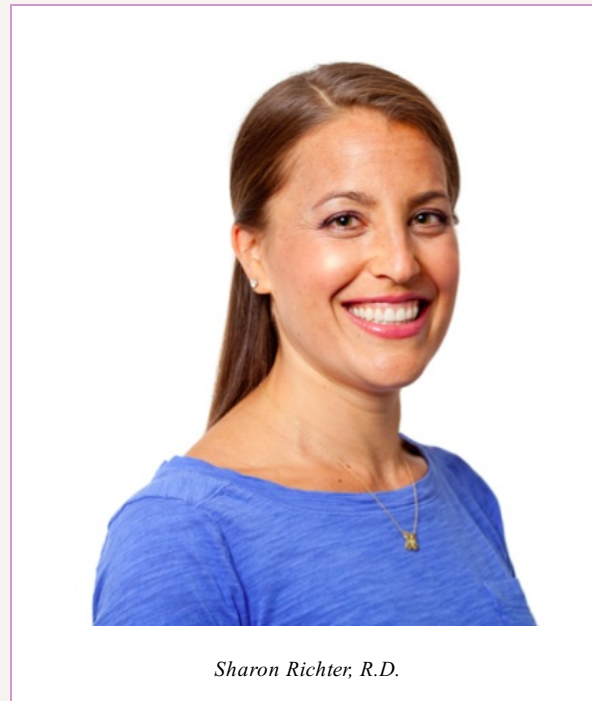
### Weight loss and maintenance

Coconut oil's MCTs have been linked to weight loss and maintenance in some small studies, like [this one](#) that showed benefits. But the body of research is not large, and critics say studies often compare it to other oils or butter, which makes it look good in comparison. Other [small studies](#) have shown it may suppress appetite, but again, the research is not conclusive.

### Antibacterial and antiviral properties

Coconut oil is also said to be antibacterial, antifungal, and antiviral, one reason many people use it for [oil pulling](#), and why it may be good for your immune system, Richter says. “One study I found shows MCTs effectively destroyed viruses.”

### The bottom line



Sharon Richter, R.D.



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“There’s not enough scientific evidence to support the major claims, but I always say everything in moderation,” Richter explains. “It’s probably not going to cure all of your ailments, but it definitely can be a better option than using butter. The main thing is that it’s not partially hydrogenated coconut oil, the really processed form of it. You want virgin, unrefined.” Write that one down. —*Lisa Elaine Held*

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### Mich T

October 18th, 2013 at 3:18 pm

I actually have never before heard of coconut oil. I try to avoid butter in my diet and this seems like a great thing to try. Thanks for posting this info!

### YOUNIQ Pilates

October 19th, 2013 at 10:41 am

I use the one on the photo as a body oil too and even though it takes some time for the skin to soak it, my skin has never been so soft, healthy and youthful. It also does not need every day application.

### Edna

October 19th, 2013 at 11:46 am

I've been using coconut oil for a while. Unfortunately it is difficult to source in the country where I live at the moment.

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