

9-2015

Offline But Not Idle

Winston J. Craig
Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs>



Part of the [International and Community Nutrition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Craig, Winston J., "Offline But Not Idle" (2015). *Lake Union Herald*. 86.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/86>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Lake Union Herald at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Lake Union Herald by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

Claims for medium chain fats may be undeliverable.



Coconut Paradise

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Coconut oil is not a miracle cure.

Coconut has risen to superfood status. Various claims have been made for different coconut products, such as coconut milk, virgin coconut oil and coconut cream. Such claims include antiviral and bactericidal properties, cholesterol reduction, weight reduction and diabetes management.

Coconut oil has a mild, nutty, vanilla flavor. Pastries made with coconut oil have a nice, flaky crust. Coconut oil has been called the healthiest oil on Earth, perfect for healthy cooking. However, the FDA does not allow a product to be labeled as healthy if a serving contains more than 1 gram of saturated fat or more than 15 percent of the calories come from saturated fat. Coconut oil con-



tains 12 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon, and has 83 percent of its calories from saturated fat. Coconut milk has 4–5 grams/serving of saturated fat, and saturated fat comprises up to 80 percent of the calories.

Virgin coconut oil comes from a wet extraction process without the use of chemicals or heat. Regular coconut oil comes from extraction of the dried coconut meat (copra) and is typically bleached, deodorized and refined.

The effect of coconut oil on blood lipids has produced mixed results. Based upon its very high saturated fat content (92 percent), coconut oil is expected to increase significantly blood cholesterol levels. Such is not always the case. While many of the earlier studies used regular coconut oil and observed a sharp elevation of blood cholesterol levels, more recent studies using virgin coconut oil produced better blood lipid levels. This is explained by the rich content of polyphenolic antioxidants in the virgin oil.

Coconut oil has been used to treat irritable bowel syndrome, chronic fatigue, psoriasis, thyroid problems, Alzheimer's disease and immune dysfunctions, and to increase the absorption of calcium and magnesium. It is claimed that

because coconut oil has unique medium-chain triglycerides, it can decrease visceral fat and waist size, increase energy expenditure, have a greater satiety effect, and does not produce body weight gain. However, insufficient evidence exists to support all these uses of coconut oil.

In January 2015, the FDA issued a warning letter to Carrington Farms, a producer of coconut products, advising them to stop making claims that caprylic acid in coconut oil can treat various infections such as Staphylococcus, Candida and ringworm, and that lauric acid lowers blood cholesterol levels and exhibits anti-microbial properties. In addition, their webpage should not claim that coconut oil can treat gastroenteritis, reduce joint and muscle inflammation, lower the incidence of hemorrhoids, help prevent osteoporosis, and soothe earaches.

While a lot of health claims have been made for coconut oil, there is no concrete scientific data yet to support these claims. Hence, we should exercise caution when reading these claims as the research data is still preliminary, and conclusions are frequently made based upon one or two rat studies. Articles on the web make it sound like coconut oil has been conclusively proven to possess a myriad of health benefits. Further evidence is needed for the benefits claimed for virgin coconut oil. In the meantime, an occasional use of coconut can be part of a healthy diet.

Winston J. Craig, Ph.D., RD, is a professor emeritus of nutrition with Andrews University. He resides in Walla Walla, Washington.