

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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After all the publicity years ago about the bad effects of palm, palm kernel and coconut oils on our health, it seems that coconut oil is trying to have a "miracle" comeback. In the 1980's we were told that those tropical oils were the cause of most of our heart attacks. As a result people stopped buying products containing coconut oil and many disappeared from the market.

The reasoning was that coconut oil is one of the few plant oils that has a lot of saturated fat. One of the benefits of most vegetable oils is that they are mostly unsaturated fats. Those are the good kinds, the ones that our liver does not turn into cholesterol. Saturated fats are the ones that clog our arteries. So even though it comes from a plant, because of all its saturated fats coconut oil is not as healthy as most other plant oils.

Instead of coconut oils in our cake mixes and baked goods, we started using partially hydrogenated soybean, corn and other vegetable oils. Hydrogenating oils gave us the same benefits that coconut oil gave us naturally - solid fats that doesn't go rancid sitting on the store shelf. And hydrogenated oils don't have as much saturated fat to turn into cholesterol in our arteries.

All that looked fine, until we started realizing that hydrogenation turns some oils into trans fats that are even worse than saturated fats! Whoops! So now the food industry is working hard to get rid of trans fats. There are ways to hydrogenate oils so that they don't make as much trans fat. There are ways to separate trans fat out of the

mixture after oil has been hydrogenated. Both are fairly expensive, and we will surely see some increases in our grocery store bill. But the health benefit is worth the cost.

It does seem strange then to see some of the new promotions on the internet, and at least one new book, claiming that coconut oil is super healthy. Supposedly it will prevent heart disease and diabetes, make you lose weight, improve your digestion, strengthen your immune system, give you beautiful hair and clean up your complexion! How could we ask for more from a food?

What we could ask for is more truthfulness in the books and ads! There is no evidence that coconut will do any of those things. It might make your hands feel softer for a few hours after you use a coconut oil lotion. It will certainly make them smell nice. But it won't fight off germs or clear your arteries.

Coconut oil has the same number of calories as olive oil or corn oil, 102 cal per tablespoon. So whether it or canola oil is used to fry those potato chips or butter the movie popcorn, they are still not healthy food choices. The fact that the saturated fat in coconut oil is a little different from butter or lard does not make it calorie free. The very slight difference in the way our body uses it is not enough to make us lose weight. Avoiding the fatty, greasy and often sweet foods that contain more calories than nutrition is what will help you get rid of the pounds and inches.

On the other hand, coconut oil is not going to kill you. If you are eating a healthy diet, with lots of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, not a lot of fat, plenty of protein, and are getting your daily exercise, an occasional food containing coconut oil will do you no harm. A daily diet of fast food, packaged snacks and sodas will do plenty of harm, no matter what kind of fats are used.

Here's a cool tropical salad to help you beat the summer heat. If you want to

toast the coconut flakes they'll be extra flavorful on top. Enjoy!

Tropical Waldorf Salad

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| 1 cup grapefruit sections | 2 cups orange sections |
| 1 cup diced celery | ½ cup chopped pecans or walnuts |
| ½ cup raisins | 1 cup low fat whipped topping |
| 1 tablespoon sugar or sweetener | 1 tablespoon lemon juice |
| 1/3 cup coconut flakes (optional- toasted) | 1 bag ready to use salad greens |

Combine fruits in large bowl. In small bowl combine topping, sugar or sweetener equivalent and lemon juice. Fold topping mixture into fruit. Divide salad greens onto 6 plates and top with fruit, or put greens in large serving bowl and top with fruit. Sprinkle with coconut flakes and serve. Serves 6.

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