

Chatting with The Good Dr. Laura Shook
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Dietary fats and oils are large complex molecules made mostly from long chains of carbon and hydrogen atoms. The chemistry is complicated, the words difficult to pronounce. For purpose of today's discussion, I'll try to avoid the technical jargon and excessive details.

Fats are from animals and are mostly solid at normal room temperature. Examples of "fats" are chicken fat, butter fat and lard. Sometimes animal fats are described as "bad fats" because they have a tendency to raise our "bad cholesterol" and lower our "good cholesterol". The good news about these "bad fats" is that they are stable at high temperatures. IF you absolutely, positively MUST fry something at a high temperature you are better off using one of the stable animal fats such as lard.

Oils are, generally speaking, from plants, nuts and seeds. They are liquid or semi solid in the refrigerator and liquid at room temperature. Examples of dietary oils are olive oil, peanut oil and walnut oil. Sometimes liquid oils are referred to as "good fats" because they have a tendency to lower "bad cholesterol" and raise "good cholesterol". The bad news about "good fats" is that they are easily damaged by chemical processing, heat, light and air. Seed and nut oils are best if kept in the refrigerator and used cold in a salad dressing.

Consider the humble walnut rich in fiber and antioxidants the oils they contain are some of the best of the "good fats". Eat a hand full of raw walnuts each day and feel your body thrive under the influence of this delicate and nutritious oil. Delicate because chemical extraction, cooking heat, air and light will damage the chemical bonding and transform this nutritious princess into a greasy zombie which will ravage your body and damage your health. Eeek! Oils "gone zombie" through chemical interference are sometimes called hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oil. Vegetable oil transformed into margarine is an example of hydrogenated oil. Read food labels and always avoid consuming hydrogenated "zombie" oil.

You have to cook with something right? Olive oil is my favorite oil to use in the kitchen. Olive oil, which is semi solid in the refrigerator and liquid at room temperature, is one of the hardier and more robust of the "good fats". Olive oil can take some heat without losing chemical integrity; it is nearly "zombie proof" making it a great oil for cooking at low or medium heats.

It is important to remember that fats and oils are densely packed with calories to provide energy. IF your next meal depended on you chasing it down on foot before carrying it back home again you might need all the calories you can get including that crispy layer of mammoth fat dripping on to the campfire. IF, however, your next meal depends on finding a good parking place at the market then you may not need as many calories and may wish to show some restraint and discretion with your personal consumption of oils and fats. There is nothing inherently evil or unhealthy about fats and oils as they appear in an unpolluted nature. Yes it is easy to eat far too much of this calorically dense food. However it is important to remember that a diet too low in fats will inhibit our ability to thrive. It is absolutely essential that we consume a modest amount of fat and oil in our diet to ensure the proper functioning of our immune, nervous, hormone and cardiovascular systems.

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