

In our last article, we discussed Popeye and spinach. I hope you tried my recipes. Anyway, we ended the piece mentioning Popeye's girlfriend, Olive Oyl. So, this being said, let us now turn our attention to Olive Oil. Pretty clever, huh? I wanted you to know about it, and how it can help you.

Let's start with the basics. First olive oil comes from olives. Don't laugh, as the obvious may not always be so obvious. Here's an example: Instead of taking you to the O.R. for a story, I'll tell you one about a junior-high classmate. On a test, the question was: Who discovered the x-ray? Science and medicine not being one his particular strengths, his answer seemed obvious, at least to him. His reply was: Dr. X-Ray. Ingenious response, but incorrect. So, it didn't work for him, but he gave it his best shot. The correct answer by the way is German physicist Wilhelm Roentgen. Enough of all this, but I did want to pass along this pearl of wisdom to you.

We'll cover a little more history and then get to the main theme of health and nutrition. The olive tree originated in modern Turkey. It has been used as food, medicine, fuel, soap, and skin care applications. In fact, athletes in ancient Greece used to rub olive oil on their bodies after competition. It even has played a role in certain religious ceremonies. Homer, the Greek poet, (not Simpson) referred to olive oil as "liquid gold."

Now, let's get down to it. Olive oil is a source of fat. The main type of fat in olive oil is monounsaturated fatty acids, or MUFAs. Please refer back to my other articles regarding explanations of fat and fatty acids.

MUFA's are considered a healthy dietary fat. Remember, fat contains nine calories per gram, so you have to watch your intake. However, this is a better kind of fat compared to saturated or trans fat. Both of these fats can be damaging to the human body, especially your arteries. The body uses fat, so I recommend healthier versions. As an example, your body must have fat to absorb and utilize the fat soluble vitamins, which are Vitamins A, D, E, and K.

Olive oil should be used instead of these other unhealthier choices rather than an addition to your diet. For example, cook with olive oil instead of butter or stick margarine, but don't put it on your toast. Again, please know you can't make unhealthy foods healthier by simply adding olive oil.

Olive oil is thought to be a source of antioxidants. It also may be heart-healthy by lowering total cholesterol and Low Density Lipoprotein Cholesterol (LDL cholesterol). It may also benefit insulin levels and help control blood sugar levels, especially useful if you are a person with Diabetes.

There have been discussions about dietary fat and cancer. Some research is pointing to poor quality dietary fat, such as some saturated fats, as being associated with certain types of malignancies. If so, olive oil would be a healthier choice. I am not saying olive oil ingestion will prevent cancer, but it is a healthier version of how to obtain higher quality of fat in the diet.

Olive oil needs to be stored in a dark area at least room temperature, or even in the refrigerator. Heat, air, and light exposure may affect taste and possibly decrease the health benefits.

The take home points are this:

Olive oil is a healthier choice of fat which should be used instead of other less healthy forms. It is a MUFA, and is preferable to saturated or trans fat. So, try cooking with olive oil.

It is associated with health benefits, especially relating to the cardiovascular system.

Thank you.

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