Cooking with oils and vinegars

Sources: Heather Norman-Burgdolf, assistant extension professor, Annhall Norris, extension specialist, Janet Mullins, extension professor

Oils and vinegars are great ways to add flavor and health benefits to your diet without using butter. But with many different options of each at the grocery store, it can be difficult to determine the type of oil or vinegar that best suits your cooking needs and diet.

Oils have anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and antibacterial properties. Some of the commonly used oils include olive, canola, vegetable, peanut and coconut.

Each of these oils has a different temperature at which it breaks down. This helps to determine its best use. Olive oil begins to break down at very low temperatures, so it is best used in salad dressings and marinades and for sauteing or drizzling. On the opposite side of the spectrum, peanut oil has the highest heat tolerance, and it is commonly used for frying foods. Canola, vegetable and coconut oils all have a moderate heat tolerance. You can use canola and vegetable oils for sauteing, baking, grilling, roasting, marinades and salad dressings. Coconut oil is used for sauteing, baking, frying and roasting. It is also used in many cosmetic products including lip balms and skin and hair care products.

The type of oil you choose may depend on the health benefits you are looking to receive from the oil. Numerous research studies have confirmed that olive oil is rich in monosaturated fats. These “good fats” may reduce your risk of rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, cancer and inflammatory bowel disease. Canola and vegetable oils do not have as many healthy fats as olive oil but are still good choices if you are looking to reduce your saturated fat intake. These plant-based oils may have health benefits including reduced risks for cardiovascular disease, insulin sensitivity, high cholesterol and inflammation. Since peanut oil has less monosaturated fats than olive, canola and vegetable oils, it may not be the healthiest choice if you want to add healthy fat to your diet. Coconut oil is made up of mostly saturated fat and has 121 calories per tablespoon. Due to its high saturated fat content, it should be used sparingly and may have a greater benefit for its cosmetic uses.

Regardless of which oil you choose to use, remember they all contain fat and calories and have a daily recommended allowance. According to MyPlate, adults should only consume 5 to 7 teaspoons of oil per day.

People have used flavored vinegars in cooking for centuries because of their antioxidant properties. Balsamic, apple cider and red wine are common types. Balsamic vinegar has a woodsy, sweet and tart flavor. It is most commonly used in salad dressings, sauces and drizzling for fruit and vegetable and meat dishes. Red wine vinegar adds a tart flavoring to hearty meals. It is used in salad dressing, soups, sauces, marinades and pickling and pairs well with beef, pork and root vegetables. Apple cider vinegar packs a lot of flavor in a small amount. It has a tangy taste with a slight hint of apple. It is used in salad dressings, marinades, sauces and soups. You can also use it to add flavor to hot and cold drinks like teas and smoothies.

More information on oils and vinegars is available in the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension publication, “Savor the flavor: Cooking with oils and vinegars.” It is available online at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/FCS3/FCS3628/FCS3628.pdf> or by contacting the (COUNTY NAME) office of the UK Cooperative Extension Service.

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