

Not all fats are bad

Boasting a slew of health benefits, olive oil is the perfect oil substitute for those seeking a healthier option but yet do not wish to compromise on taste.

According to Eve Persak, a Registered Dietitian (RD) and a board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics (CSSD) with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, olive oil is packed with plenty of good stuff, including antioxidants and healthy fats, which help maintain a healthy level of cholesterol, lowers blood pressure, lowers the risk of cancer, protects the digestive tract, improves cognitive function, and more.

“Olive oils are high in monounsaturated fats, and diets that are high in these specific kinds of fats (such as the Mediterranean diet) are shown to promote better heart health and improve

blood sugar regulation. Olive oils are also high in oleocanthal – a polyphenol (natural plant chemicals), which has been found to have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, linked with reducing cancer risk. Another highlight to note about olive oil is that it is rich in vitamin E – a valuable antioxidant micronutrient for skin, hair, and hormonal balance,” she says.

TYPES OF OLIVE OIL ■ EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

Known as the highest grade of all types of olive oil, this is yielded from the first pressing of younger olives – the olives are pressed within 24 hours of picking.

Produced by cleaning, grinding, and pressing the olives (just once) to extract their natural oils, Extra Virgin olive oil is 100% olive oil, not blended with any other oils, and does not contain any additives or preservatives. The end result usually has a darker yellowish-green colour and a sweet, smooth taste with gentle hints of spiciness. The colour of extra virgin olive oils can vary from green to yellow, depending on a variety of factors, such as the place of origin and the ripeness of the olives. Since this product is minimally processed, it retains most of the





nutritionally beneficial compounds, such as vitamins E and K, which is said to be good for the skin and hair.

Do note that this oil has a very low acidity rate (under 1%) and is best used for dipping or to dress salads - both because its superior flavour is impaired by heat and because it has a low smoking point.

Uses: *For dipping, as a salad dressing and baking. For external use, extra virgin olive oil can be applied to the skin and hair for smoother skin and hair growth.*

■ OLIVE OIL

Often marketed under names like "Natural" or "Pure" olive oil, this is made with 100% olive oils (no other vegetable oils or additives). During production, a second layer of refinement (chemical or heat) is used to remove some of the pungent smell and flavour, as well as to prolong shelf life and allow for low-temperature cooking. The additional processing, however, reduces the amount of antioxidants and micronutrients.

Uses: *Perfect for baking, sautéing or browning, and as a salad dressing, especially if you do not want the oil to impart its flavour to the dish.*

■ LIGHT-TASTING OLIVE OIL

Best suited for consumers who do not like the strong flavours of olive oil, this variant features a more neutral colour and taste. Thanks to its higher smoke

point, this oil can be used for baking, sautéing, grilling and even frying.

Uses: *For cooking or baking.*

■ ORGANIC VS. CONVENTIONAL OLIVE OILS

"Certified organic oils will have a similar nutrient profile to their conventional peers with respect to fats, vitamins, etc., however, to reduce the amount of nasty chemicals and additives that you and your loved ones consume, choosing organic-certified foods is one of the best choices you can make.

And when olive oils are concerned, it is important to note that the delicate flesh of olives is quite easy for herbicides and synthetic fertilisers to penetrate, and when pressed to produce olive oils, traces of these chemicals are also extracted. Considering that extraction is a "concentration" of many olives, this also compounds the amount of chemicals that may end up in the finished product," Eve shares.

■ WHAT DOES CERTIFIED ORGANIC MEAN?

Certified organic food is grown and processed without synthetic pesticides, herbicides, hormones or antibiotics. It's non-GMO and biodiversity friendly. When purchasing organic products, be sure to look out for the following labels:

USDA Organic, EU Organic and IFOAM – these seals are your best assurance of the organic quality, as the growers and manufacturers of organic products bearing these seals have very strict production and labeling requirements.

■ DOES ORGANIC MATTER?

"There are many health concerns surrounding increased disease risk with exposure to herbicides, pesticides, and synthetic fertilisers, therefore consuming organic alleviates this. There are also global environmental concerns with prolific use of chemicals in growing and processing edibles (fresh produce, grains, etc.). Investing in certified organic products is conscious commitment to making eco-friendly purchases and a promoting a greener planet," says Eve.

