Coconut oil is an edible oil extracted from the “meat” of matured coconuts. It has several applications in the food industry. It is used in processed foods because it is relatively inexpensive and can provide crisp texture to foods. Coconut oil has a high smoke point, the temperature where it starts to break down, which makes it shelf stable and ideal for foods that need a longer shelf-life. Hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated coconut oil are found in cereals, baked goods, biscuits, salty snacks, soaps, cosmetics and moisturizers.

According to some health food promoters and celebrity doctors, coconut oil is the latest miracle food, claiming it can cure everything from heart disease to obesity and cancer. However, the effects of coconut oil on health have not been well studied. These health claims tend to be based more on personal testimonials than on scientific evidence. In fact, there are very few studies in people showing benefits of coconut oil – most of these studies are epidemiology studies (e.g., population studies) that show a link between high coconut-consuming countries and longevity [1-2].

Coconut oil is considered a saturated fat and contains 9 calories per gram. There are two basic types of fats – saturated and unsaturated. Unsaturated fats are healthy fats and include plant-based fats (such as vegetable oils and fats found in nuts, avocados and seeds) and fish oils. These fats should be the primary fats in your diet because they either do not affect cholesterol levels or they raise HDL (good) cholesterol without raising LDL (bad) cholesterol.

Saturated fats found in animal fats and tropical oils, including coconut oil, should be consumed only in small amounts because they raise both HDL (good) and LDL (bad) cholesterol. The U.S. 2010 Dietary Guidelines recommend that saturated fat should be limited to 7 to 10 percent of total calories because it can increase risk for heart disease. The fat in pure virgin coconut oil is about 92 percent saturated, the highest amount of saturated fat of any edible fat, which means it doesn’t take much of it for you to reach your daily saturated fat limit [2].

However, some of the saturated fatty acids found in coconut oil, lauric acid and myristic acid, have been linked with some positive health benefits [3-6]. For example, lauric acid has been shown in many studies to increase HDL cholesterol and decrease LDL cholesterol, but when taken as an isolated fatty acid, not as part of coconut oil [6]. Coconut oil is unique because it also contains a high level of medium chain triglycerides (MCT), which are metabolized differently. University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture, and County Governments Cooperating than long chain fatty acids such as lauric and myristic acids. MCTs are transported directly from the intestinal tract to the liver, where they are burned off as fuel, which may raise the metabolic rate slightly [4-5]. With MCT going through this metabolic pathway, less fatty acids are available to be circulated throughout the body and deposited in fat tissues. Since the effect of MCT oil on weight loss is modest, it is not likely that coconut oil, which is only about half MCTs, will have much effect on weight loss. Only one study has been conducted on the effect of coconut oil on weight loss, a master’s thesis in Brazil, and there was no significant effect [3].

Because the saturated fat in coconut oil is from lauric acid, coconut oil may be better for you than butter and other animal fats. Although coconut oil doesn’t contain cholesterol, some studies show that it raises both LDL and HDL cholesterol [6]. If you choose to use coconut oil, choose “virgin” or unrefined coconut oil and use it in moderation. (continued on next page)
Summer Sewing Workshop for Youth

I am in need of help with a Youth sewing workshop this summer at the Extension Office. The tentative dates are the 3rd week in June. Last year, we did: pillowcases and short sets. Some of the children have never sewn before and others are more advanced. Many of these youth enter the items they make in the County Fair. If you have any ideas or would love to help, please give me a call at 870-864-1916. Thank you!

It is requested from State that each EHC member who attends the meeting bring a baby blanket. The receiving blankets are used at Arkansas Children’s Hospital. They should measure 36” x 36” and be pink, blue, yellow, green or white. NO PRINTS. Material should be light weight fleece or flannel. Edges can be finished with surging or crocheting. Flannel can be hemmed. We could have the workshop in the conference room at the Extension Office. Would you be interested in having a Baby Blanket Workshop? If so, please call the Extension Office.

- May 20: Board Meeting
- June 7-9: AEHC State Meeting
- June 16: Horticulture Field Day in Hope
- June 17: Board Meeting
- September 19-23: Union County Fair
- August 20: Achievement Day (Tentative) at Parkview Baptist Church
- October 22: Holiday Foods (Tentative)

Lauren Brown - CEA Family and Consumer Science

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Many health care organizations such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the American Heart Association advise against the consumption of high amounts of coconut oil due to its high levels of saturated fat. One tablespoon of coconut oil contains 117 calories, 14 grams of fat, 12 grams of saturated fat and is generally more costly than healthier fats. If you are looking for real health benefits, liquid vegetable oils like soybean, canola, corn or olive oil are better choices.

The Bottom Line

If you enjoy the taste of coconut oil and coconut water, include small amounts of it in your diet, but don’t expect big rewards. There is no strong scientific evidence that proves eating coconut oil or drinking coconut water has any great health benefits.