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■ Olive Oil Essentials

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Olive Oil and Health

Whether eaten raw or heated, olive oil is one of the healthiest foods that we can consume because of its monosaturated fatty acids and balanced polyunsaturate content—not to mention its content of vitamin E, provitamin E, and antioxidants. This combination of nourishing properties gives it a positive effect on human health. (Fats can be divided into two broad categories: saturated and unsaturated. Saturated fats, like butter and lard, are solid even when they are at room temperature. On the other hand, unsaturated fats are liquid when at room temperature and have a lower cholesterol level because of the low density of lipids.) Olive oil is extremely high in monosaturated fat and very low in saturated fat. It has been shown not only to lower cholesterol, but to protect against heart disease. The people who live around the Mediterranean basin use olive oil as the fat of choice on everything from sautés to salads and sauces, and they typically have very low rates of coronary disease. Of course, the Mediterranean diet is also rich in fruits, vegetables, and grains, and relies on meat only in very small amounts, which also contributes to that population's good health.

Olive oil has been shown to have many other health benefits, including:

- Slowing aging of tissue, since it is an antioxidant
- Reducing the risk of heart disease and aiding circulation in



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Some of the healthful components extra-virgin olive oil has been shown to contain are:

- Chlorophyll, carotene, and polyphenols, all antioxidants
- Lecithin, an antioxidant that stimulates metabolism
- Vitamins A and D

Extra-virgin olive oil is far superior to seed oils. First, it is produced only by pressing, while seed oils are extracted using artificial solvents. Olive oils contain monounsaturated fats rather than seed oils' polyunsaturated fats, reducing LDL ("bad") cholesterol and maintaining HDL ("good") cholesterol, which diminishes risk of clogged arteries. Also, unlike seed oil, olive oil can withstand the high temperatures cooking requires.

In the ancient world, olive oil had multiple uses. It was rubbed on wounds; used to cleanse the skin or cure it from sunburns; and drunk as a tonic to cure nausea, headaches and insomnia. Today, modern science is merely proving what ancient civilizations knew long ago: olive oil is good for you, so use it as much as possible!

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