

Nutrition Nuggets: *Olive Oil is NOT Health Food*

by Delisa Renideo

When I teach nutrition and cooking classes, one of the main principles is to eat a low-fat diet of whole plant foods. This includes using no added oils. Invariably, there is a shocked reaction. What? ? ? Not even olive oil? ? ? But that is a GOOD fat!

Indeed, we have been bombarded on all sides with the message that olive oil is good for us. We have heard how the Mediterranean Diet is supposed to be so healthy for our hearts. Is it true?

Jeff Novick, a registered dietitian and extremely funny speaker, sets us straight. (Visit his website at www.jeffnovick.com.)

Olive oil is high in monounsaturated fats, and it is true that foods high in monounsaturated fats are “healthier” than foods high in saturated or trans fats. However, that doesn’t make them good for us! As Jeff says, a “healthier” cigarette, one that contains less nicotine, still leads to lung cancer!

If you replace saturated fat with olive oil, you’ll see your health improve somewhat. But it’s not because of the addition of the olive oil; it’s because of the reduction in saturated fat! You would see the most improvement by reducing ALL the fat,

including the olive oil.

We have made the assumption that it was the olive oil in the Mediterranean Diet that was healthy. Actually, it was the high level of antioxidants in the vegetables and fruits in the Mediterranean Diet that provided protection for their hearts, in spite of the olive oil! If we eat the vegetables and fruits and leave out the olive oil, we’ll have a much healthier diet.

Olive oil, like all oil, is pure fat. One hundred percent of the calories come from fat, and it is a whopping 120 calories per tablespoon! Adding just one tablespoon of olive oil to your food each day adds up to 3600 calories per month, or a little over a pound of fat on

your thighs or tummy each month. That’s 12 pounds a year! All for a measly tablespoon of this highly overrated oil. With two-thirds of Americans overweight or obese, we certainly don’t need these extra calories.

The more we research nutrition, the more we learn about the importance of keeping the fat in our diets low, to about 10% of our total calorie intake, which is 20 - 25 grams of fat per day in a 2000 calorie/day diet. All food contains some fat, including



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fruits and vegetables which generally have from 5% -10% of their calories coming from fat. With one tablespoon of olive oil weighing in at 14 grams of fat, it doesn't leave much room for food.

A single high fat meal causes damage to the endothelial layer of our arteries, greatly increasing our risk of heart attack. High fat diets also lead to intramuscular fat (which you can have even if you look thin) which causes insulin resistance leading to diabetes. High fat diets also contribute to cancer by causing our bodies to produce more hormones, such as estrogen and testosterone.

And at nine calories per gram, fat has more than double the calories of proteins or carbohydrates, which have only four calories per gram. The more fat we eat, the more fat we are likely to wear! Obesity itself is a risk factor in most of our major diseases.

By eating vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes, with small amounts of nuts and seeds, we consume the right amount of fat.

By eating a diet based on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes, with small amounts of nuts and seeds, we consume the right amount of fat. But when we add animal products, junk food, fried food, or even olive oil, we end up consuming

more fat than we should to support optimal health.