

More On Coconut Oil

Carl Ferré

DEAR EDITOR,

I read the coconut miracle article with great interest because someone who I was counseling asked me about coconut oil and gave me two books to read. Dr. Fife wrote both books. I had no experience with coconut oil and expressed my reservations. At that point, the counseling sessions to explore a supposed thyroid condition were terminated by that person.

I was surprised that Macrobiotics Today titled the article, "Natures Miracle Oil: Coconut Oil" as though it was a fact. If a question mark would have been placed after the title I would have felt more comfortable. After all, is coconut oil really a natural miracle? There are people who think, or at least want you to think, canola oil is also a miracle oil.

I was surprised that the article found its way into Macrobiotics Today because there is no indication the author has any feeling for macrobiotics or that he is aware of the magic spectacles of yin and yang. The article lists an extraordinary array of conditions either cured or helped by the oil. When so many claims are made it makes you wonder if another fad is being inflated and marketed much

as canola oil was. Dr. Fife has purchased a traditional ad in the box below his article to accompany the ad for his books disguised as an article in Macrobiotics Today. According to Dr. Ken Woliner in articles, which can be viewed at www.about.com, Dr. Fife no longer sees any patients and is financially connected to the coconut oil industry and the sale of coconut oil books. Dr. Woliner has written a letter to Dr. Fife professionally questioning the claims made for coconut oil, especially for thyroid conditions, and the studies behind them. All of which can be read at the site mentioned.

All of the above is not to say that coconut oil isn't a miracle oil. Maybe it is but I have the following questions: What are the long-term tropical yin effects for temperate climate users? Is the supply of coconut oil socially, environmentally, and financially peaceful?

Sincerely,
Steve Yochum

HI STEVE,

Thank you very much for your well-written letter. Your questions are very good and I agree that . . . I should have put an editor's note at the

beginning of the article something to the effect that the opinions expressed and claims made are those of the author and not necessarily those of *Macrobiotics Today*.

Coconut oil and Dr. Fife were introduced to us by a long time macrobiotic counselor and cooking teacher. . . . Thank you again for pointing readers to these important issues and I will respond more fully when time allows.

Best,
Carl Ferré

HI CARL,

The truth is, I'm very curious about coconut oil. I don't want to be narrow minded and reject it just because it hasn't yet resonated in the macrobiotic community. By the way, is Dr. Fife in some way associated with macrobiotics? The evidence he presents though perhaps a little hyped is attractive. Has someone with a good mind for these things in the macrobiotic community looked at the yin and yang of it all? Do you use it? I have thought about experimenting with it myself but actually we don't use that much extracted oil in our daily cooking so I don't know if we would

ingest enough to learn anything. Do you have any suggestions along those lines? Seems like if you are into baking it might be easier to test it.

I want you to know that my wife and I read *Macrobotics Today* from cover to cover. You live in California and I assume you have a nice local network to share conversations and ideas about macrobotics. Here in South Central Indiana that is not the case. It gets a little lonely sometimes but the magazine helps a lot. Thanks for your work. I am relieved by the tone of your e-mail. I didn't want to come off as some cranky, picky critic. I really wanted a dialogue. Once again, thanks for the magazine. Oh, the article by Murray Snyder is pretty deep, don't you think? I loved it!

Suggestion: More articles like the Rice's, "Macrobotics In Israel." For someone who is not a world traveler like me, it is very interesting to hear about macrobotics in other parts of the world.

Thanks,
Steve Yochum

HI AGAIN STEVE,

Thank you for your response, kind words, questions, and suggestions. We also have received several phone calls regarding the use of coconut oil and thus I greatly appreciate your taking the time to write/dialogue about this important topic. I have asked Julia to respond with her experience using coconut oil. Also, included here is Annemarie Colbin's letter that we received regarding the article. Before responding to your questions about macrobotic principles here is some background information on coconut oil.

Whenever I receive a question about a food product, I turn to Rebecca Wood's excellent book, *The New Whole Foods Encyclopedia*. I recommend one read the entire listing titled "Fat and Oil" and then read her writing about coconut oil. She recommends only butter and coconut oil for baking

and sautéing. The other oils become denatured at temperatures above 240 degrees making the result toxic. Here are her thoughts on the health benefits of unrefined coconut oil.

"Unrefined coconut oil is lower in calories than most fats and oils. Moreover, it is over 50 percent medium-chain fatty acids, the kind that are not stored as fat. Rather, the body metabolizes medium-chain fatty acids into energy. This makes coconut oil a favorite food of dieters and athletes.

"Possibly, however, coconut oil's most remarkable property is that it's one of the few significant plant sources of lauric acid. This medium-chain fatty acid, which is also found in hu-

"Each person needs to decide for herself or himself if and how much coconut oil is appropriate and the best ways to use it in his or her own practice.."

man milk, enhances brain function and the immune system.

"Unrefined coconut oil is free of the toxic trans-fatty acids found in hydrogenated and refined oils. It does not clog the arteries or cause heart disease. . . ."

"What are the long-term tropical yin effects for temperate climate users?"

While most of the macrobotic books do not mention coconut oil, it is the most yin oil that is listed in *Zen Macrobotics* by George Ohsawa in his "Macrobotic Table of Foods and Beverages." Thus, according to macrobotic theory, the long-term effect of ingesting too much coconut oil

could be detrimental, especially for those in colder regions. On the other hand, those who are overly yang and those in warmer/tropical climates might benefit from its use. The question becomes how much is too much? Of course, this varies from person to person and from time to time. The reality is that we all need some fat in our diets and we all need good-quality yin.

Ohsawa taught non-credo—do not believe—try it and determine for yourself the proper use and quantity. Ohsawa said, "every front has a back, the bigger the front the bigger the back." In other words, any thing that can be of great benefit can be of great harm if used improperly. Thus, it is good that you are questioning the use of this "miracle" food.

"Is the supply of coconut oil socially, environmentally, and financially peaceful?"

In order to answer this question, one would need to contact or to trust the company producing it. In other words, the same question could be asked regarding the production of any oil or of any food. Quality is the operative word and worth paying extra for in my opinion.

"Has someone with a good mind for these things in the macrobotic community looked at the yin and yang of it all?"

Even though coconut oil is considered more yin than all other oils listed in the macrobotic literature, it has an important quality. The only unrefined vegetarian fats that remain stable (more yang) above 240 degrees are coconut oil and palm oil. What I've seen over the years is much confusion about yin and yang as people try to make one "good" and the other "bad." As Julia told me, "yin and yang are not in competition with each other—they are both good."

Thus, even though coconut oil is considered to be more yin, all oils are yin and using one's knowledge of yin

and yang, the yin effects of any food can be balanced through the art of macrobiotic cooking. Thus, I would not rule out the use of coconut oil based solely on the fact that it is considered to be more yin than other oils. I would, however, recommend that everyone continue to study macrobiotic principles and cooking, and to use care and caution when using any food with which one is unfamiliar. Each person needs to decide for herself or himself if and how much coconut oil is appropriate and the best ways to use it in his or her own practice.

Carl Ferré

Coconut Oil – Do you use it?

When I first looked for coconut oil, it was a bit tricky finding a jar of it at my health food store as there weren't any jars on the shelf by the other oils. After looking for a while I asked the clerk and was directed to the health and beauty aisle where the coconut oil was shelved next to the body lotions. What a surprise! I asked myself if I really wanted to cook with something used as a body cream.

I was under the impression that coconut oil was superb for cooking as it could withstand higher temperatures than other oils, so it would be great for frying and baking. Yet I was definitely in the wrong section of the store. After comparing the labels of the oils they had I determined that the company Spectrum had an organic coconut oil, a commercial coconut oil, and a coconut oil that they sell specifically not for food consumption. While the organic and commercial varieties were marketed for use with food, I chose the organic one. In the few years since that incident, I've noticed that now the organic coconut oil is stocked by the other oils.

Coconut oil is neat stuff. It is solid at cooler temperatures, like in the store or on a shelf in the winter, but will become liquid as the temperatures rise. I have used it for various preparations. Tempeh, marinated in a cumin, soy, and ginger sauce and then

deep-fried is delicious. The flavors of tempeh, coconut, and cumin are very compatible.

Granola, on the other hand, didn't turn out as good. However, the recipe deserves a second chance, perhaps with maple syrup as the sweetener rather than barley malt.

Lentil curry was okay but the coconut oil flavor was highly present—not incompatible, just unique, and something I noticed with the first bite. I got used to it and ate the whole dish, but, to be honest, I prefer sesame oil with lentils and curry.

My experience in using coconut oil is very minimal. My desire for using coconut oil is minimal also, more due to time constraints than aversion. I currently have limited time for experimentation.

So to answer the question: Is coconut oil something we use? Yes, but not exclusively, and as it turns out, not that often. One jar can last months.

Julia Ferré

Hi CARL,

I hope you are well. I'm writing about the article "Nature's Miracle Oil," in the September/October issue of Macrobiotics Today. It is a very nice piece, clearly written, and understandable to the non-scientific reader. We at The Natural Gourmet Cookery School would like permission to make copies of the entire piece and distribute it to our students as we are in full agreement with this position and a lot of people question us.

All best regards,

Annemarie Colbin, Ph.D.

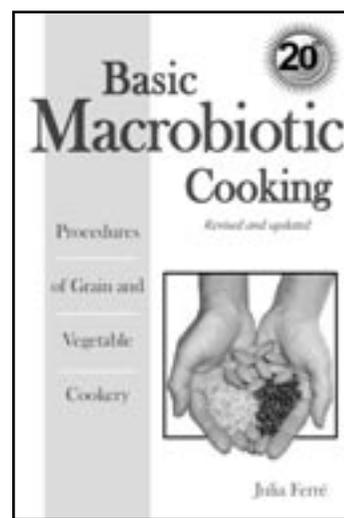


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