

Daily Union Article
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Title: Olive Oil Basics

With greater emphasis placed on consuming healthy fats as a key to a healthier diet, many consumers have turned to olive oil. Although olive oil has been used for thousands of years, it's culinary popularity has seen a recent spike. The increased use has introduced new terminology and label claims that could easily leave you both confused and curious. The following information targets those who want to know more about this type of trending oil.

Olive oil is produced by pressing whole olives to extract the liquid base of the oil. The oil is mostly made up of oleic acid with other fats present in smaller quantities. Olive oil has been used historically in lamp oil, cosmetics, and body lotions and liniments. It continues to be used in those products as well as in cooked and non-cooked foods.

Whether using olive oil in place of butter or in making homemade salad dressing, simple substitutions will allow you to consume 4 tablespoons per day – the recommended amount identified in United States Department of Agriculture's 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines. You want to be cautious not to over-indulge, though. Consuming more than the recommended amount won't necessarily increase the health benefits proportionality. Moderation, as with all foods, is key.

Healthy fats include both polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Polyunsaturated fats, especially omega-3's, may lower cholesterol. Monounsaturated fats may improve cholesterol levels and decrease the risk of heart disease. Making intentional food choices that replace saturated fats with monounsaturated fats can have a beneficial effect on your heart. Olive oil is a monounsaturated fat.

Olive oil works well in salad dressing or used when cooking. Although avocado oil is also a monounsaturated fat, it is typically more expensive than olive oil.

However, not all olive oils are created equal. Containers labeled simply "Olive Oil" contain a much lower-grade product than those labeled "Extra Virgin Olive Oil".

"Olive Oil" (aka Pure Olive Oil) is made from defective olive oil that has been refined to remove the defects. What results is a nearly tasteless, colorless, and odorless oil that is then mixed with a small quantity of extra virgin grade oil to give it some flavor.

"Extra Virgin Olive Oil" is the best and most expensive oil. It is made from fresh olives – extracted from the fruit solely through mechanical means. High quality ripe olives are pressed soon after harvest with clean equipment that maintains temperatures below 86°F. Solvents are not added during processing (which is often the case with standard olive oil). During the processing of extra virgin olive oil, many lab tests and taste screenings are conducted by an International Olive Council (IOC) recognized panel.

The taste must have some fruitiness and zero defects. The IOC has established the standards for these two types of oils and other grades of olive oil internationally.

The following chart* shows some additional comparisons between olive oil and extra virgin olive oil:

	Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO)	Olive Oil
Flavor	Varies, can be seasoned and can be blended for consistency	Typically mild to low flavor and consistency
Health Benefits	♥♥♥♥♥	♥♥♥
Smoke Point	350-410°F	390-468°F
Price Point	\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$	\$\$
Cold Use	Drizzling, dipping, dressings, and marinades	Dressing and marinades
Hot Uses & Cooking	Sautéing, grilling, roasting, baking, pan-frying	Sautéing, grilling, roasting, baking, pan-frying

Additional Olive Oil Label terms:

Light Olive Oil: This is essentially the same thing as pure olive oil. It is light in flavor but the amount of fat and number of calories are the same as any other type of olive oil.

First Cold Press: This phrase dates back to the days when olive paste was manually pressed between mats to extract the oil. Modern day processing is done mechanically using centrifuge.

Harvest Date: On some labels, producers note the date when the olives were harvested. Others may put a "use by" date, which is usually two years after the oil was made. It is best practice to use the olive oil right away as it *does not* get better with age and may turn rancid over an extended period of time.

Bottled (or Produced) in Italy: You cannot count on this claim being reliable. The laws regarding this type of labeling are not tightly written. However, if a label states "California Olive Oil", by law, it must be made from 100% California olive oil.

Other tips:

- It's important to note that the fat and calories are actually the same in all grades of olive oil.
- Remember any type of fat (oil) is high in calories.
- Olive oil does not get better with age.
- When choosing a bottle at the store, check for a "use by" date.

- Make sure the bottle doesn't show signs of mishandling or age, such as oil drips or leaks.
- Avoid buying oils with an orange tint color if in a clear bottle, or dust on the bottle suggesting it has been on the shelf a long time.
- When oil is properly stored in a cool, dark place, it should keep in the original sealed packaging for about 18 months to two years. *

Olive oil is not only trendy, it's a healthier alternative to other fats you will find on the grocery store shelf. Try substituting this tasting oil in your recipes for a fresh change. Until next time, keep living resourcefully.

* *Source: Michigan State University Extension, March 13, 2015 – "Olive Oil 101" Author: Pamela Daniels.*