

## wildfact

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# Coconut Craze

These days it seems like people can't get enough coconut. From coconut water, milk, and oil, coconut has been touted as a superfood, but is it as healthy as everyone thinks? Let's look at some facts about this trendy tropical food.

**Coconut water** is the clear liquid found in the fruit's center. Its slightly sweet, nutty flavor and natural electrolytes, potassium and sodium, have made it a popular substitute for saltier and sweeter-tasting sports drinks. Although coconut water will keep you hydrated, it's a bit pricy and won't provide you with adequate calories and nutrition if you're exercising strenuously for two or more hours. In this case, supplement coconut water with fruit like a banana or raisins to help replenish fluid and electrolytes along with energy stores.

**Coconut milk** comes from the pulverized flesh of the coconut meat, which is the white fleshy part pulled from the hard shell. Although fresh coconut has fiber, potassium and some iron, the milk has a whopping 552 calories per cup! Because it is so rich, use it in small portions in

cooking or choose a reduced fat variety instead. Some of the calories from coconut milk are coming from sugar and protein, but the bulk are from fat, AKA coconut oil.

**Coconut oil** has gotten lots of praise from health and exercise enthusiasts, but medical experts caution the public about the hype. Coconut oil is one of the only concentrated sources of plant-based saturated fat (the other is palm kernel oil), which is the type that American Heart Association cautions against eating due to its blood cholesterol raising effect. Coconut oil advocates argue that because it's a medium-chained triglyceride (MCT), it doesn't have the same effect as fatty meats and dairy, but the science indicates that fats in coconut oil (lauric, palmitic and myristic) do raise levels of good, bad and total cholesterol and may increase risk of heart disease. If you enjoy coconut oil, use it sparingly (as you would any oil) and not as your primary cooking oil, especially if you have heart disease or it runs in your family. Instead, stick to using oils with mostly unsaturated fats like olive, canola and peanut.



## CAMPUS HEALTH

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Food and nutrition services (including healthy eating, cooking skills, weight management, digestive problems, hormonal and cardiovascular diseases, and eating disorders) are offered year-round at Campus Health. Call (520) 621-6483 to make an appointment.