

## HEALTH BENEFITS OF OLIVE OIL

For centuries, olive oil has been used to maintain the suppleness of skin and muscle, to heal abrasions, to give body and sheen to hair and soothe the drying effects of sun and wind. Additionally, olive oil has been used in folk remedies for an array of uses; strengthening weak nails, aiding in digestion, curing the effects of alcohol consumption, relieving aching muscles, lowering blood pressure and many other uses.

Recently, research has provided proof that a Mediterranean style diet, including olive oil, is a healthy diet and that olive oil might reduce cholesterol levels. The American Heart Association found that in researching the modern day diet that Greece and especially the island of Crete had the lowest mortality rate due to cardio-vascular illness. Finland and the United States had the highest mortality rate. The only notable difference between the two countries was the type of fat ingested. In countries with high incidents of cardio-vascular disease, saturated fats were most often consumed. Saturated fats are high in cholesterol. Monosaturates, on the other hand, contain no cholesterol.

Fats and lipids are essential to a well balanced diet. They divide into saturates and unsaturates depending on whether they have simple or double bonds between their carbon groups. Fatty acids that have one double are monounsaturates. Polyunsaturates have several double bonds. Olive oil contains unsaturated fatty acids. Oleic acid and linoleic acid are two unsaturated fatty acids. Olive oil is 80% oleic acid, placing it on top of the list of monounsaturated fats. Saturated fatty acids are found in animal fats such as butter and lard.

There are two types of cholesterol; low density (LDL) and high density (HDL). LDL's transport and deposit cholesterol in the tissues and arteries. LDL levels increase with a high intake of saturated fatty acids and are harmful. HDL eliminates cholesterol from the cells and carries it into the liver where it is passed through the bile ducts. While polyunsaturates reduce both the LDL and HDL, monounsaturates reduce LDL while increasing HDL. HDL is often referred to as "good cholesterol". An increase in the levels of HDL will not only provide protection against cholesterol deposits, but it will actually reduce cholesterol levels in the body. Research has proven that using olive oil significantly increases HDL levels and that olive oil is the main source of monounsaturated fatty acids.