# Olive oil health claims challenged amid rise of seed oil debate



# The Great Olive Oil Debate: Health Benefits or a Modern Conundrum?

In recent years, olive oil has often been praised as a miracle elixir, linked to numerous health benefits ranging from improved heart health to reduced inflammation. This liquid gold, a staple of the Mediterranean diet, is widely regarded as one of the healthiest options for cooking. However, a growing discourse has emerged, critiquing the baseless obsession with olive oil and examining its potential downsides.

Laurentia Campbell, a nutrition specialist and adviser to the World Health Organization, raises a crucial point regarding the body of research on olive oil, asserting that most studies predominantly involve healthier individuals adhering to Mediterranean lifestyles. Such conditions warrant skepticism about the generalizability of the findings. The spotlight on olive oil, fueled by celebrities and influencers, often overshadows other cooking oils like safflower, sunflower, and soybean, the latter of which have been unjustly vilified. Some health advocates even claim that these seed oils contribute to a plethora of chronic conditions, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease.

While prominent figures like Robert F. Kennedy Jr. have gone as far as to describe the consumption of seed oils as a form of being “unknowingly poisoned,” experts advise caution in interpreting these claims. The evidence surrounding seed oils is mixed, suggesting that they can be safe and beneficial when used appropriately. Critics of the olive oil craze, like Campbell, caution against extreme behaviours, noting that overindulgence in any oil can lead not only to weight gain but can also negatively impact cholesterol levels. For instance, one dietitian revealed that a client’s weight loss efforts were hindered by his daily consumption of an entire cup of olive oil—an extreme that can counteract the benefits typically associated with the oil.

Indeed, olive oil's caloric density means moderation is key. According to early research, moderate consumption of olive oil—specifically, more than half a tablespoon daily—has been linked to a significantly reduced risk of cardiovascular death compared to those consuming less. Yet, as health influencers encourage people to drink it straight or add it to unusual recipes, such as drizzling it over ice cream, experts warn that such practices may not yield any additional health benefits. The critique echoes sentiments shared by other professionals who observe that a well-balanced diet, rather than an olive oil-centric regime, is essential for optimal health.

Furthermore, the health benefits of oils, including their ratios of omega-3s and omega-6s and how they are utilised in cooking, should be considered. Different oils exhibit varying smoke points—the temperature at which they begin to break down and produce harmful byproducts. Olive oil, at approximately 325 degrees Fahrenheit (165 degrees Celsius), has a lower smoke point than many seed oils, including avocado and sunflower oils, raising concerns about its reliability for high-temperature cooking.

Health studies continue to support the notion that seed oils can lower bad cholesterol and have a place in a balanced diet. The American Heart Association emphasises that omega-6 fatty acids, found in many seed oils, play essential roles in the body and can help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. However, it is the overconsumption of ultra-processed foods that deserves scrutiny, rather than seed oils themselves, which are often merely a component of these products.

Furthermore, the wellness community has increasingly popularised various unprecedented uses for olive oil, from skincare to unproven longevity diets. Figures like Jennifer Lopez advocate for its application in beauty routines, while biohacker Bryan Johnson incorporates it into his extreme health regimen. Such endorsements have the potential to obscure the simpler, scientifically validated uses of olive oil, leading to public confusion and misapplication.

In conclusion, while olive oil is a valuable part of a healthy diet, moderation remains vital. Advocates for a balanced approach caution against the extremes advocated by influencers, warning that misguided enthusiasm could lead to unintended health consequences. As with many aspects of nutrition, it's crucial to rely on trusted scientific evidence and personal health needs rather than prevailing trends.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687793/dietitians-olive-oil-making-you-FAT-UNHEALTHY.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.heart.org/en/news/2024/08/20/theres-no-reason-to-avoid-seed-oils-and-plenty-of-reasons-to-eat-them)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687793/dietitians-olive-oil-making-you-FAT-UNHEALTHY.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.axios.com/2024/12/28/seed-oil-rfk-ultra-processed-food), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/4fdf0f30134277fd6dd20b4ede789295)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687793/dietitians-olive-oil-making-you-FAT-UNHEALTHY.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://time.com/7010480/oil-health-myths/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://time.com/6967480/olive-oil-shot-healthy/), [[5]](https://time.com/7010480/oil-health-myths/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687793/dietitians-olive-oil-making-you-FAT-UNHEALTHY.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.heart.org/en/news/2024/08/20/theres-no-reason-to-avoid-seed-oils-and-plenty-of-reasons-to-eat-them)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.axios.com/2024/12/28/seed-oil-rfk-ultra-processed-food), [[7]](https://www.goodrx.com/well-being/diet-nutrition/are-seed-oils-bad-for-you)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://time.com/7010480/oil-health-myths/), [[6]](https://www.heart.org/en/news/2024/08/20/theres-no-reason-to-avoid-seed-oils-and-plenty-of-reasons-to-eat-them)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687793/dietitians-olive-oil-making-you-FAT-UNHEALTHY.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://time.com/6967480/olive-oil-shot-healthy/> - This article discusses the trend of consuming shots of extra virgin olive oil, popularized by celebrities like Kourtney Kardashian and Ryan Seacrest. Experts argue that there's no scientific evidence supporting unique benefits from consuming olive oil this way compared to incorporating it normally into meals. Olive oil, rich in healthy monounsaturated fats and antioxidants, offers many health benefits, including reduced risk of heart disease, better metabolic and cognitive functions, and lower cancer risks, but these benefits are optimally achieved through moderated use. Drinking olive oil adds unnecessary calories, potentially leading to weight gain without satiety, and may cause digestive discomfort. Experts recommend using olive oil in cooking and as part of balanced meals rather than consuming it straight.
3. <https://www.axios.com/2024/12/28/seed-oil-rfk-ultra-processed-food> - Seed oils have become a focal point for Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and various health influencers who assert that these oils are linked to chronic illnesses. However, many health experts argue that these concerns are overstated and not grounded in science. Studies have shown that seed oils are safe and can even be associated with reduced risks of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and Type 2 diabetes. The broader issue stems from Americans' heavy reliance on processed foods and poor dietary habits. Health professionals emphasize that while seed oils used in home cooking are generally fine in moderation, the consumption of ultra-processed foods, often high in seed oils, should be minimized. The core problem lies in the overconsumption of fast food and heavily processed products, not the seed oils themselves.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/4fdf0f30134277fd6dd20b4ede789295> - Seed oils have recently become the subject of controversy, with critics including internet influencers, wellness gurus, and politicians like Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who claim that these oils are harmful and contribute to inflammation and chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. These oils, including canola, soybean, and corn oil, are staples in many kitchens and are often found in processed foods. Critics label these top refined vegetable oils as "the hateful eight." However, nutrition scientists are exasperated by these claims, stating that decades of research show the health benefits of consuming seed oils, particularly over alternatives like butter or lard. Scientific evidence confirms that seed oils lower bad cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. Research also contradicts the claim that seed oils cause inflammation. While some food-makers and restaurants have removed seed oils from their products in response to consumer concerns, experts argue that a return to beef tallow is not a healthier option and emphasize a need for more nuanced nutrition research.
5. <https://time.com/7010480/oil-health-myths/> - Amid abundant online advice, six major myths about oils for cooking and other uses are debunked based on scientific evidence. Firstly, cooking with extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is beneficial despite a perceived low smoke point. EVOO's phenols protect both the oil and the food's nutrients. Secondly, more expensive oils aren't necessarily healthier—focus on freshness and authenticity. Thirdly, while non-olive oils like canola can be healthy, coconut oil, in particular, is high in saturated fats with minimal heart benefits. Fourthly, "oil pulling" with coconut oil doesn't surpass conventional dental hygiene methods. Fifthly, oiling hair may vary in benefits, with coconut oil potentially exacerbating dandruff and no strong proof for olive oil's effectiveness. Lastly, oils have mixed effects on acne, with some being comedogenic. The takeaways encourage moderation, careful selection, and reliance on proven methods and scientific backing rather than anecdotes.
6. <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2024/08/20/theres-no-reason-to-avoid-seed-oils-and-plenty-of-reasons-to-eat-them> - The American Heart Association addresses concerns about seed oils, emphasizing that omega-6 fatty acids are essential for health and can help reduce bad cholesterol, lowering the risk for heart disease and stroke. While omega-6 is pro-inflammatory, the amount of inflammation it's associated with has not been shown to be harmful. The article also highlights that the real concern should be overeating ultra-processed foods, which may contain harmful ingredients such as high-fructose corn syrup, added sugar, and sodium. Seed oils aren't the problem in those foods; it's the overconsumption of fast food and heavily processed products that pose health risks.
7. <https://www.goodrx.com/well-being/diet-nutrition/are-seed-oils-bad-for-you> - This article examines the health implications of seed oils, noting that while they are high in omega-6 fatty acids, which can lead to inflammation, the evidence is not strong enough to draw definitive conclusions. The article emphasizes that seed oils are fine in moderation and should be part of an overall balanced eating plan that includes lots of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean protein options. The real concern lies in the overuse of seed oils in ultra-processed foods and the repeated heating of these oils, which can create harmful compounds. Cooking at home with seed oils and using them once isn't a health issue; it's the overconsumption of processed foods that poses risks.