COCONUT OIL MAY DECREASE YOUR WAISTLINE...IF YOU’RE A MALAYSIAN MALE

The latest dietary fad seems to be promoting coconut oil for weight loss, high cholesterol, preventing heart disease and Alzheimer’s disease. These misleading claims appear to be based on extrapolations from a couple small studies of similar products, and anecdotes.

To begin to explain, a study published last year reported a 1% decrease in waist circumference in 20 obese Malaysian volunteers after they ate (“virgin”, or extracted with less heat) coconut oil for a month. The circumference loss was more significant in males than females, but still not statistically significant by most definitions of the term. No change was reported in lipid (cholesterol) measurements, nor was there weight loss.

Coconut oil is touted because some of its fat is different than most plant fats. Some medium chain triglycerides (MCT) in coconut oil don’t require bile for absorption into the bloodstream, and don’t end up in adipose (fat) tissue. Controversy exists over exactly which MCT may provide this benefit and how much is present in coconut oil (likely insignificant). (This may explain why newborns massaged with coconut oil gain weight better than when massaged with mineral oil.)

Small studies of dieters consuming an extract consisting of only medium chain triglycerides have shown a slight increase in weight loss over periods of 1 to four months. (Who knows whether this would be sustained over longer periods of time.) However, the only published coconut oil study specifically examining weight loss showed no difference in weight loss between women eating 2 tablespoons of coconut oil versus 2 tablespoons of soybean oil daily for 3 months. Of course, eating more than a total of two tablespoons of fat a day will promote weight gain.

A study of men from India with and without heart disease did not reveal any difference in dietary coconut oil. Other studies of blood changes in those consuming coconut oil show both improvement and worsening of the various markers related to heart disease, including good and bad cholesterol. Some researchers suspect that the fats in coconut that cause it to be solid at room temperature also actually make it worse for heart disease.

The claim about Alzheimer’s disease is apparently based on one person’s experience; studies have not confirmed it.

In conclusion, there’s no good evidence that switching from eating olive oil to coconut oil will help your weight or health.

REFERENCES:
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