

# Coconut: A Wonder food

The coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) is known as a “wonder-food”. Its Indian name is *narial*. It is a near-perfect diet, as it contains almost all



the essential nutrients needed by the human body.

Experts describe the coconut as not just a fruit, but a nut and a seed as well – a drupe. It has three layers. The outermost part of the fruit is green and shining when tender. It becomes rough after its maturity. It is almost entirely water-proof and very hard. Beneath this is a thick layer of stout fibres, the layer being at times over 25-mm thick. Then follows a hard stone-like layer, about 6-mm thick. The inside of this stony layer is lined with fairly thick coating of soft, milky-white flesh. The cavity inside the flesh is filled with a watery fluid. It grows on a tall stately, unbranched tree, with a terminal crown of leaves growing to a height of 20 to 30 metres.

## Origin and distribution

Coconut is believed to have originated in the Indo-Malaya region and to the south west of New Guinea. It was taken to the mainland of Asia in prehistoric times. There is evidence that the coconut was grown in India about 3000 years ago. The Vedas describe coconut tree as *Kalpa-Vriksha* or the ‘tree of heaven’, Coconut reached East Africa, and

possibly Panama before 1492. Thereafter, it gradually spread to all tropical areas of the world. It is now widely cultivated in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Philippines, East Indies, the west Indies and islands of the Indian and Pacific oceans. Total 61 million tonnes of coconut is grown in nine countries of the world. The Philippines has the maximum coconut production. Coconut tree grows abundantly along the entire coast of the sea and also thrives well in loose sandy soil. It can live up to 200 years.

## High food value

The coconut is a highly nourishing, strengthening and fattening food item.

It has high oil content (lauric acid) which is easily digestible. It is more easily utilised by the body than all other fats. The protein content of coconut is of high quality, containing all the essential amino acids. It is also rich in potassium, sodium, magnesium, and sulphur. The energy value of dried coconut is very high, being 662 calories per 100 grams.

## Coconut water

The water of tender green coconut is used as a beverage and refreshing drink. A one-month-old fully grown tender coconut



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contains about 400 to 465 ml of water. It has special properties.

1. It is pure and hundred percent natural and safe.
2. Tender coconut water is a sterile natural drink with high nutritional value.
3. It contains less fat compared to milk. It is free from cholesterol. It helps to increase good cholesterol (HDL) in the body.
4. It is an excellent tonic for health. The water of a single coconut contains sufficient vitamin C to meet daily requirement of the body.
5. It also contains several vitamins of the B group. These are niacin, pantothenic acid, biotin, riboflavin, folic acid and thiamine, as well as pyridoxine in traces.
6. Coconut water also contains sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium, iron, copper, phosphorus, and sulphur.
7. It contains less sodium compared to beverages available in the market.
8. Since tender coconut has high contents of potassium, it aids in dehydration by restoring electrolyte balance.
9. Tender coconut water is good first-aid home remedy in place of saline transfusion.
10. It contains natural sugar and is tasty.
11. Coconut milk is a rich source of proteins and is easily digestible. In the dilute form, it is good liquid food for the aged and weak.
12. Massaging the face with coconut milk regularly relieves pimples and prevents premature wrinkles.
13. The tender coconut kernel, which is a rich source of enzymes, is beneficial to diabetics, as it does not have starch.

Tender coconut water is very useful in cholera, to prevent dehydration and electrolyte imbalance. When taken with fresh lime juice it restores the electrolyte balance and neutralises the acidosis of the

**Coconut: Nutritional facts\***

Moisture	36.3%	Potassium	24.7%
Protein	4.2%	Calcium	40%
Fat	41.6%	Magnesium	15%
Minerals	1.10%	Phosphorus	6.3%
Fibre	3.6%	Iron	79%
Carbohydrates	13%	Vitamin B	2.2%
		Vitamin C	3.7%
Fresh coconut's calorific value – 444			
Dried coconut's calorific value – 662			
*Values per 100 grams edible portion. Source, USDA Nutrient Database.			



secretion of the stomach and gives much relief to the patient. Coconut oil is a tried and tested remedy not only for hair fall, but is also helpful in maintaining good texture of the hair. There are other benefits too. Application of a paste of coconut oil and turmeric powder relieves pain in cracked heels and wounds.

blood. Coconut water is a known source of potassium-rich fluid and beneficial for cholera patients.

Mature dried coconut is valuable in the treatment of acidity. Its oil reduces the acid

**Digestive system disorders**

Tender kernel of coconut is highly beneficial in the treatment of digestive system disorders. It is valuable in conditions like indigestion, colitis, gastric ulcers, diarrhoea, dysentery

and piles. The tender coconut water is also an excellent remedy for flatulence, vomiting and dyspepsia.

Ascites is a disease which causes swelling in the stomach due to fluid accumulation. Coconut water is valuable in ascites. The patient should be given two or three glassful of coconut water to drink. This quantity may be increased or decreased according to condition and the needs of the patient.

The oil extracted from the flesh of ripe coconut is an effective dressing for burns and scalds. It is of great value in the preparation of ointments as it penetrates the skin readily. The tar-like fluid obtained from the red, hot shell of a ripe coconut is a rubefacient which causes reddening and warming of the skin. It is household remedy for ringworm, itch and other skin diseases.

The coconut is widely used in the preparation of many products. The oil is the most important of these products. It is used in cooking and also as a hair-restorer and is used as hair oil. Dried coconut is used in cooking and in various preparations of sweets and curries.

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**Extremely Drug Resistant Tuberculosis (continued from page 30)**

**Treatment**

The treatment of XDR-TB requires extensive chemotherapy for up to two years. For XDR-TB there is a reduced number treatment options and therefore it is associated with



higher mortality rate compared to MDR-TB. Recent studies have shown that XDR-TB can be treated through the use of aggressive regimens. Successful outcome depends on a number of factors such as the extent of drug resistance, the severity of the disease and whether the patient's immune system is compromised. It also depends on access to laboratories that can provide early and accurate diagnosis so that effective treatment is provided as soon as possible.

**Risk factors**

Studies on the effect of age and XDR-TB have found that individuals who are 65 and up are less prone to getting XDR-TB. A study in Japan has found that the younger are at higher risk of getting XDR-TB. Studies have

shown that men are more prone to getting XDR-TB than women. One study showed that the male to female ratio was more than threefold.

**XDR-TB and HIV/AIDS**

TB is one of the most common infections in HIV/AIDS patients. Where XDR-TB is most common, HIV patients are at greater risk of becoming infected with XDR-TB, compared with HIV negatives, because of their weakened immune system.

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