

COCONUT

Nature's goodness
Good for your heart



Coconut and coconut oil has been the subject of controversy for nearly four decades. It seems to be a never ending process. The recent release of the Presidential Advisory from the American Heart Association (AHA) on Dietary Fats and Cardiovascular Diseases is the subject of latest controversy. The old wine is again being brought in a new bottle. The release of AHA on Dietary Fats and Cardiovascular Diseases strongly advocates against the use of coconut oil.

In spite of the propaganda against coconut oil, it still holds the status of a premium edible oil. It was in 1956, that some studies in USA found that there are saturated fatty acids in coconut oil. They concluded that all saturated fatty acids are not good for health. Later on it was revealed that these studies were funded by the association of soybean producers. Unfortunately this negative publicity against coconut oil linking its consumption with Coronary Artery Disease (CAD) in human beings got over attention of the media. This negative propaganda not only discouraged new users but also weaned away traditional users of coconut oil. This in turn impacted the demand of coconut oil and adversely affected the crop to a certain extent.

American nutritionists like Dr. Mary G. Enig and Dr. John J. Kabara have proved that coconut oil even though contains saturated fatty acids, they are medium chain fatty acids and not adding to cholesterol in human body. The medium chain fatty acids in coconut oil are similar to fatty acids in mother's milk and have similar nutraceutical effects. Many renowned doctors from India also have proved that the mispropaganda against coconut oil is baseless. Researches done by Dr. Rajamohan, Head of the Department of Biochemistry of University of Kerala

have revealed the beneficial effects of coconut oil and these results are published in many scientific journals.

Study by Sri Chithira Thirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Thiruvanthapuram analysed whether coconut oil is influencing cholesterol level in CAD patients and controls. No difference was noticed in the mean levels of total cholesterol or LDL cholesterol (the bad cholesterol). At the same time the mean triglyceride level was lower in exclusive coconut oil users. This indicates that the habitual consumption of coconut oil along with normal diet did not elevate the cholesterol level or LDL. Study undertaken by Amritha Institute of medical Sciences, Kochi under Dr. M. Vasudevan analysed serum from persons, consuming coconut oil or sunflower oil. No statistically significant difference was observed in the cholesterol, HDL or LDL levels in coconut oil consuming population versus sunflower oil consuming population. Thus plasma fatty acid composition reflected no changes with dietary fat source.

In 1970's negative propaganda on the use of CNO cropped up in India and CNO was cornered in most of the kitchens and replaced by palm oil. Dr. Mary Enig, a famous US nutritionist visited India in 1994 and many hitherto unknown facts were brought to the limelight. According to Dr. Mary Enig, over the past 40 years, the American diet had undergone major changes – involving more fats and oils. There had been an increasing supply of the partially hydrogenated trans fatty acid-containing vegetable oils and a decreasing amount of the lauric acid-containing oils. As a result, there has been an increased consumption of trans fatty acids and linoleic acid and a decrease in the consumption of lauric acid. This type of change in diet has an effect on the fatty acids the body has available

for metabolic activities. Revelations of Dr. Mary Enig opened up serious and widespread debate and discussions among medical doctors in India, more particularly in Kerala.

USA which had initialized the propaganda against coconut oil is now the largest importer of coconut oil.. The major portion of the coconut oil imported to USA are used by the baby food and bakery industries. It is also being used for producing ingredients of anti fungal medicines.

Coconut and coconut related products help in maintaining wellness with a range of health benefits. There are an array of medicines, creams and ayurvedic oils which are made with coconut oil as basic medium. Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO) contains lots of vitamins, minerals and anti oxidants. VCO is a major source of lauric acid and Vitamin E. Coconut is a good source of dietary fibre known to be valuable in digestive function. Desiccated coconut contains the highest percentage of dietary fibre and due to this there is increasing demand for the desiccated coconut in many developed countries.

Coconut oil is accepted by medical practitioners, scientists and experts world over as the best oil for human health. This is made possible through the research work and clinical studies undertaken by eminent doctors, nutritionists and scientists from various countries for scientifically establishing the positive attributes of coconut and coconut oil. Their untiring efforts for promoting the infinite goodness of coconut and its products have now brought out its health and nutritional benefits.

Positive attributes of any useful product cannot be kept hidden for long through negative propaganda by forces with vested interest. Whether it is a food product or agriculture product or cooking oil, scientific truth will come out and if it is having beneficial effects on human health and nutrition, no one can keep it away from public attention. The scientific studies and clinical research have clearly brought out the good properties, health and nutritional benefits of coconut.

However the researchers in health and nutrition from many countries, both developed and developing, after realising the potential benefits of coconut and its products, have started advocating its positive effects in human health, nutrition and wellness.

As coconut is a rich source of many minerals it may be positioned at a prominent place in the daily diet. Wellness is a status where diseases are cured, good health is maintained and good immunity is retained. We have case studies from many parts of the world wherein many diseases are cured with the use of coconut and its various products. It was believed that



there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease. But doctors from USA have certified the beneficial effects of Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO) in treating Alzheimer's patients. This is one of the reasons for the increasing trend in the import of VCO to USA.

Based on the research work done to date, most of the claims of of AHA have been proven to be erroneous, false and misleading. The Asian and Pacific Coconut Community (APCC) is taking a bold stand against such harmful publicity in respect of the socio economic welfare of stakeholders in coconut sector. APCC states that as a result of reputable research work concluded and other ongoing studies by credible and eminent nutritionists and clinical scientists world over, the coconut industry is making the best ever comeback that is termed as the 'coconut revolution' and product wise the 'coconut craze' in many countries and consumer destinations. ■