

Nutrition FACT CHECK



Seed Oils



What are seed oils?

The most well-known seed oils are canola, soybean, safflower, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed, rice bran and peanut oils. Seed oils provide saturated, monounsaturated (MUFAs) and polyunsaturated fats (PUFAs). PUFAs are often present in the highest amounts and are the hot topic of today's conversations on seed oils.

Research supports

Current research supports using seed oils as part of a balanced diet, particularly as alternatives to saturated fats. While some concerns remain about inflammation or oxidative effects, most studies don't find these effects when seed oils are consumed in typical dietary amounts. Credentialed health professionals continue to recommend seed oils over animal fats due to their potential to lower cardiovascular risk. As with any fat, seed oils are best used in moderation alongside a diet that emphasizes whole, minimally processed foods.

Seed oils and your health

Omega fatty acids

Omega fatty acids are often categorized as omega-3s are "good" and omega-6s are "bad," but there is no evidence to support this statement.

- Omega-3 fatty acids (found in foods such as fatty fish, walnuts, chia and flax-seeds) can help support brain and heart health.
- Omega-6 fats are beneficial for lowering the risk of heart disease.

Inflammation

- Linoleic acid, the main omega-6 in seed oils, can convert to arachidonic acid, a precursor to inflammation. However, only a small amount is converted and higher omega-6 intake is linked to better heart health.
- While omega-3s have strong anti-inflammatory effects, there's no clear evidence that omega-6s are pro-inflammatory.

Toxicity

- Many seed oils are processed at high temperatures, which can create harmful toxic products; these are mostly removed during refining. Cold pressed or expeller pressed oils avoid chemicals but have lower smoke points for cooking, shorter shelf lives and are more expensive.

Lower mortality risk

A study found that:

- High intake of plant-based oils was associated with a 16% lower risk of total mortality; high butter intake had a 15% higher risk
- Canola, soybean and olive oils were especially associated with lower mortality
- Replacing butter with plant oils reduced total and cancer mortality by 17%.
- Higher plant oil intake lowered cancer mortality risks by 11% and cardiovascular risks by 6%

Cholesterol and blood sugar

- Studies have found that vegetable/seed oils high in MUFAs and PUFAs – such as canola, rice bran and olive oil—may help reduce total and LDL cholesterol, improve blood sugar control and support weight management.
- Multiple reviews show that higher intake of linoleic acid (higher PUFA) and replacing SFA with LA/PUFAs can improve heart health and lower type 2 diabetes risk.
- A 2025 review indicated that seed oils like canola, flaxseed and sesame improve lipid profiles, blood sugar control and may reduce oxidative stress.

Healthy ways to use seed oils

- Substitute for some of the solid fat in baked goods, such as whole-grain muffins
- Season a cast iron skillet
- Oil grill grates to keep food from sticking
- Roast vegetables in the oven to get a toasted flavor
- Stir-fry meat and vegetables
- Pop popcorn on the stove
- Make salad dressings—the fat in oils increases the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, E and K that are in leafy greens
- More recipes featuring healthy fats are available on eatright.org



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