

Part 4, Chapter 38: Olestra, Palm and Cottonseed Oil

Dr. Bragg specifically recommends against Olestra, palm and cottonseed oil—and for good reasons. As Dr. Bragg points out, “These additives are not fit for human consumption and should be totally avoided.”^{1}

Chemists create olestra by combining two naturally occurring substances, sucrose and vegetable oil, to form a molecule that is not found anywhere in nature. Yet the resulting synthetic molecule tastes just like real fats do! Fat is what makes candy bars and French fries so filling (and fattening). With olestra, you get the taste of the fat without any of the calories of the fat, because your body has no way to digest olestra.^{2}

Doesn't that sound like a good idea? Wait. There's a caveat. This stuff has zero functional calories, though it tastes just like fat, because your body can't digest it.

Olestra may cause abdominal cramping and loose stools (anal leakage). Olestra inhibits the absorption of some vitamins and other nutrients. Fat-soluble nutrients consumed with olestra products are excreted with the undigested olestra molecules. [Olestra pulls fat soluble vitamins out of your body.] To counteract this loss of nutrients, products made with olestra are fortified with oil-soluble vitamins [as if that actually helps].^{3}

Well, that makes me feel good. The bottom line is that this stuff is artificial crap and has no place in the human diet.



Of palm oil, the issue is more of how is grown and its processing than its use. Authority Nutrition presents a balanced presentation on the subject:

- Palm oil comes from palm trees native to Africa, where it has been consumed for thousands of years. It is semi-solid at room temperature [like coconut oil] and differs from palm kernel oil in nutritional composition.
- Palm oil is used in cooking, especially in West African cuisines and curries. It is also found in certain foods, products and fuels.
- Palm oil is 100% fat, half of which is saturated. It also contains vitamin E and red palm oil contains antioxidants called carotenoids, which your body can convert into vitamin A.
- Palm oil may help protect brain function, reduce heart disease risk factors and increase vitamin A levels in certain people.^{4}

The above are the positive points. Keep in mind that this is assuming that this is raw cold pressed palm oil. On the negative side: “Replacing tropical forests and peatland with palm oil trees is devastating the environment, wildlife and people’s quality of life.”^{5} The biggest issue here is environmental. The not so pretty picture is that:

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Palm oil has become one of the world's leading causes of rainforest destruction. Unchecked expansion has pushed palm oil plantations into the heart of some of the world's most culturally and biologically diverse ecosystems and palm oil is among the biggest threats driving iconic wildlife species like the Sumatran orangutan to the brink of extinction in Indonesia. This large-scale destruction of rainforests and carbon-rich peatland landscapes is releasing globally significant quantities of carbon pollution into the atmosphere, making palm oil a major global driver of human induced climate change. The production of palm oil is also responsible for widespread human rights violations as palm oil companies often forcefully remove indigenous peoples and rural communities from their lands.^{5}

Capitalism at its worst. There's a lot of debate about palm oil. With the FDA finally cracking down on trans fat, palm oil has become the substitute of choice. Still, like so many oils, when heat processed, it is turned into a hydrogenated oil bordering on becoming trans fat. Moreover, "palm oil contains a high proportion of saturated fat, which we know also has adverse health effects."^{6} In a hydrogenated form it's just as destructive as any other hydrogenated oil. Compounding the problem is the environmental issue mentioned above. It takes a great deal of land to grow palm trees which yield a relatively small amount of oil per plant.

Like some many questionable foods, palm oil is probably one you can live without. To be sure, you definitely don't want to be consuming this oil once it's been hydrogenated.



Of cottonseed oil:

Cottonseed oil is said to be low in trans fat, which, according to its supporters, makes it a healthful option. It is similar to canola, corn, safflower, soybean, and sunflower in terms of its unsaturated fat oil composition.

Cottonseed oil is a familiar feature of processed foods, which I absolutely recommend you avoid if you want to achieve true health. It's a popular ingredient in margarines, icings, and whipped toppings, because it helps form beta prime crystal, which promotes the ideal texture and creamy appearance of shortenings, spreads, and similar products. Cottonseed oil is also added to salads.^{7}

As a hydrogenated oil, it shares many of the problems of other hydrogenated oils: clogging blood vessels, increasing the risk of a heart attack ... Nevertheless, "This oil comes with potentially damaging side effects due to either the ingredient it's made from or the manufacturing process used to extract it. Because these negative effects overshadow the potential benefits, I [Dr. Mercola] do not recommend this oil for therapeutic use."^{8} Basically, same story, different day. To my way of thinking, the above notwithstanding, the vast majority of cottonseed oil is made from genetically modified plant seeds for which no one knows the long term effects.