



## Olive oil 'good' fat but high in calories

**I'm thinking of starting a diet that says to eat one tablespoon of light olive oil twice a day, before meals, but I'm worried it will raise my cholesterol. Any advice?**

First, the good news: Like any type of dietary fat, olive oil is a mix of saturated, polyunsaturated, and monounsaturated fatty acids — but olive oil contains 77 percent monounsaturated fat. The only other type of oil typically consumed in the United States that comes close is canola oil with 62 percent monounsaturated fat. That's important because monounsaturated fat has been associated with decreasing "bad" cholesterol — low-density lipoproteins, or LDLs — and increasing "good" cholesterol — high-density lipoproteins, or HDLs. So, as far as fats go, olive oil is a good choice.

But all fats, olive oil included, contain 14 grams of fat and about 120 calories per tablespoon. The "light" in "extra light" or "light" olive oil refers to its color and flavor, not its fat or calorie content.

Consuming two tablespoons of fat each day in addition to meals could easily increase your calorie consumption by about 240 calories a day. If you consume, over time, 3,500 calories more than you expend, you'll gain a pound. So, unless you restrict other calories throughout the day, that oil could actually

cause you to gain a pound every two weeks or so.

In addition, although it is a good source of monounsaturated fat, olive oil (like other fats) doesn't have many other nutrients to offer. For 240 calories, you're getting some vitamin E and vitamin K, but no other vitamins or minerals to speak of. Instead, for that number of calories, you could eat two ounces of baby carrots, an orange, and a six-ounce container of nonfat yogurt — and get healthy portions of vitamins A and C, fiber and calcium, as well as a host of other nutrients.

Another piece of guidance: What you're considering adopting is what nutritionists classify as a "fad diet," and they generally caution people to stay away from them. According to the American Dietetic Association, "food fads" involve unreasonable or exaggerated beliefs that eating (or not eating) specific foods, nutrient supplements, or combinations of certain foods may cure disease, convey special health benefits, or offer quick weight loss. A more judicious approach to weight loss is to simply know what you're eating: Choose a balanced diet with plenty of vegetables, fruit and whole grains; limit your portion sizes; and understand that calories count.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [flipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:flipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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**Editor:**

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