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The awkward truth about canola oil

Written by [Zanna Taeni](#) | 23 June, 2022

Blog



Strolling through the supermarket aisles, you try to dodge the processed and packaged foods – but this proves challenging. There are so many convenient options available at your fingertips. And when you have a family, convenience is key.

The inconvenient reality is that many, if not most, of those foods contain an ingredient that is doing your body an unbelievable amount of harm. *What is it*, you ask? It's canola oil.

What exactly *is* canola oil?

Otherwise disguised as the generic “vegetable oil” in the ingredients list of almost every food item – from chips to dips and even muesli bars! Canola oil was first created by Canadian scientists (“can” = Canadian, “ola” = oil). By crossbreeding an edible type of rapeseed plant to remove its toxic compounds, chemical extraction is then achieved via the heating, flaking and pressing of the canola seed.

The popularity of canola oil stems from the fact that it has a high smoke point, is extremely easy to grow and is, therefore, one of the less expensive oils to use in large-scale food production and manufacturing. It is also a rich source of polyunsaturated fats (PUFAs), in particular the omega-6, alpha linoleic acid – a healthy PUFA when taken in *moderate* amounts.

What does canola oil do to the body?

The body's inflammatory and immune cells are altered by the fatty acid profile of an individual's diet. Despite being considered a “healthy oil” by most mainstream food authorities, canola is often referred to in the USA as a “refined, bleached, deodorised” (RBD) oil due to its manufacturing process. It is detrimental to the body for several reasons.

- It is partially hydrogenated, a process in which molecules of hydrogen are pumped into the oil to change its chemical structure. This makes the oil solid at room temperature and prolongs its shelf life, but it also creates artificial trans fats. Even in small amounts, these have been linked to calcification of the arteries and reduced cognitive ability.
- Most canola crops are genetically modified to increase plant tolerance to harmful herbicides, such as glyphosate. There are studies to suggest that, because of the increase in oleic acid, consuming GMO food can wreak havoc on the body's organs and immune system, leading to potential toxicity, free radical damage and even cancer.
- All polyunsaturated fats help to reduce “bad” cholesterol in the body. But the overconsumption of processed foods containing omega-6 rich “vegetable oils”, combined with a lack of omega-3 rich foods (such as oily fish), has led to an imbalanced fatty acid ratio. This can raise levels of inflammation in the body and lead to a higher risk of overall disease.

So what can you use instead of canola oil?

Refining an oil by removing impurities and free fatty acids generally increases its smoke point. On the flip side, cold pressing oils is an ancient method that yields the best quality oil. These oils must be refrigerated in a dark bottle to prevent oxidation and subsequent rancidity. The healthiest oils that are the closest to their natural state are sesame oil and olive oil.

For drizzling over salads it doesn't matter which oil you use, but when pan-frying the optimal temperature is around 180°C (even higher for Asian stir-fries cooked in a wok). Burned oil does not taste pleasant, but it can also produce toxic, cancer-causing substances, such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH's). Therefore, it is best to opt for an oil with a high smoke point, such as the following:

Cooking oil and smoke point

- Avocado oil: 271°C
- Rice bran oil: 254°C
- Ghee: 250°C
- Sunflower oil: 232°C
- Almond oil: 216°C
- Grapeseed oil: 216°C
- Olive oil (virgin): 216°C
- Macadamia: 210°C
- Olive oil (extra virgin): 191-207°C
- Butter: 177°C
- Coconut oil: 177°C
- Sesame oil: 177°C
- Hemp oil: 165°C
- Sunflower oil: 160°C
- Flaxseed oil: 107°C

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Zanna Taeni graduated from Endeavour College in 2020 with a Bachelor of Health Science (Nutritional and Dietetic Medicine) and is now working as a health and wellness writer and voice over artist. She lives in the Byron Bay hinterland with her two children and is a big-time foodie who is always in the kitchen experimenting with new and nourishing recipes to feed her picky little eaters. In her free time, Zanna enjoys delving into her creative projects, spending time immersed in nature, and exploring topics such as spirituality and personal development.

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