

Real Foods That Heal



Weekly bulletin, volume 1, #1
December 31, 2007

Olive Oil

In his excellent book, *Eat Drink and be Healthy* (Free Press, 2005), Dr. Walter Willett of the Harvard School of Public Health, establishes healthy oils and fats as the foundation of healthy eating. Oils and fats are a necessary part of the diet, and for average individuals should account for about 30% of daily calories. Evidence is conclusive now from years of research that the types of oils and fats we consume plays a critical role in future health risk. This is because oils and fats are used by the body as components of our cell membranes, and because they are used in the immune system to modify (for better or worse) the inflammatory response. Too much unchecked inflammation in the body is a part of the beginning of disease.

So it was not surprising when I found yet another article on the benefits of olive oil. In 1995, the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* published an article looking at risk of breast cancer in women from Greece. They found that increased consumption of olive oil (more than once a day) decreased the chances of breast cancer by about 25%. The same article reported that margarine consumption increased the odds of breast cancer (about 5%), and (no surprise here) that overall consumption of fruits and vegetables decreased the risk.

My recommendation: discard all margarine and products that contain hydrogenated oils; buy extra virgin olive oil, preferably organically grown, and use it for salad dressings, for sautéing vegetables, and for dipping your bread at dinner. Really good olive oil has a fairly strong, fruity flavor; the so called "light" olive oils are not so flavorsome and often come from poor quality oils that had to be refined to make them edible.

My simple recipe: this one is really simple. If you have bread or rolls with your dinner, instead of butter or margarine, take a shallow bowl or small plate and pour enough olive oil just to cover the bottom. Then pour in a tablespoon or less of balsamic vinegar. Mix the oil and vinegar with a fork, add a little ground black pepper if you like or even a few sprinkles of parmesan cheese. This makes an excellent dipping sauce for your bread (whole grain of course!) and gets that healthy olive oil into you in a tasty way.

Bon appetit!

To your health,

Robert Pendergrast, MD

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