

# Easy ways to reap the benefits of extra virgin olive oil

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(HealthDay)—When it comes to healthy oils, extra virgin olive

oil—EVOO for short—is the top choice for your healthy pantry.

Because it's the first press of the olives, extra virgin olive oil not only tastes better, but also has higher levels of antioxidants and other micronutrients that may help protect against diseases, from Alzheimer's to breast cancer. When you shop for EVOO, avoid imitators. Look for the words "100 percent Extra Virgin Olive Oil" on the label. The oil must be pressed from olives alone, not mixed with nut or [seed oil](#).

Over the years, investigative research found that some foreign olive oil labels aren't always clear about what country the olives were grown in versus where the oil was bottled, which can make it hard to know the true origin of the oil. One answer is to choose oil made in the United States, notably Californian EVOO. Look for the California Olive Oil Council seal.

Choose olive oil bottled in dark glass to help protect its delicate antioxidants from light. Once opened, you'll want to use up a bottle of EVOO within a few months. Some brands now list "use by" dates.

EVOO has one of the lower smoke points compared to other oils—that means it burns faster and shouldn't be used for long, high temperature cooking, like deep frying. The antioxidants can be damaged by high heat, too. Here are three easy no-cook ways to use it.

Drizzle EVOO on [salad greens](#) and top with heart healthy nuts, seeds or ground flax. For added flavor, sprinkle with a pinch of salt, a squeeze of fresh lemon or a teaspoon of your favorite vinegar.

Toss steamed vegetables with a teaspoon of EVOO, then sprinkle with spices or herbs.

Make a flavorful pesto to use as a sauce for pasta or protein, or to use as

a sandwich spread instead of mayo. Simply puree a quarter-cup of EVOO with two cups each of packed spinach and basil, and a half-cup each of grated parmesan and walnuts in a food processor. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and store for up to four days in the fridge.

From salads to sides, it's easy to get the health benefits of [extra virgin olive oil](#) into your meals.

**More information:** Learn more about [olive oil](#) at the University of California, Davis Olive Center website.

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