Coconut Oil:

What Is Coconut Oil?
Coconut oil is an edible oil, like olive or macadamia oil, extracted from the kernel or meat of mature coconuts. The oil is made up of around 90% saturated fat, 6% monounsaturated fat, and 3% polyunsaturated fat. Unlike other highly saturated and unsaturated fats, coconut oil is mostly made up of medium chain fatty acids (MCFAs). The saturated fat content makes coconut oil very heat-stable and enables a long shelf life. It is well-known for its healing, anti-inflammatory properties and its metabolism-boosting medium chain tryglycerides.

Benefits of Coconut Oil
Coconut oil has many benefits, from being directly associated with specific positive health effects to acting as an aid in certain body functions. Based on what is and has been studied and reported, coconut oil has the following uses:

- Boosts metabolism & aids with weight loss.
- Improves insulin secretion and utilisation of blood glucose.
- Improves heart health & reduces health risks associated with diabetes.
- Supports thyroid function.
- Supports immune system.
- It's anti-fungal, antiviral & antibacterial.
- Promotes healing & tissue repair.
- Improves digestion & nutrient absorption.
- Enhances physical performance.
- Hydrates and protects the skin, improves skin tone and prevents wrinkles and skin aging.
- Reduces psoriasis, eczema symptoms.
- Improves hair and scalp condition.
- Functions as a protective antioxidant.
- It's a quick energy source and controls sugar cravings.
- Relieves stress on pancreas and enzyme systems of the body.
- Reduces symptoms associated with pancreatitis.
- Helps relieve symptoms associated with chronic fatigue syndrome.
- Relieves symptoms associated with benign prostatic hyperplasia (prostate enlargement).
- Reduces epileptic seizures.
- Helps protect against kidney disease and bladder infections.
- Prevents Parkinson's disease and possibly Alzheimer's
- And much more.

How Does It Work?
Lauric acid is a compound with amazing health promoting properties. It contains antifungal, antibacterial, antiviral properties that boost the immune system. Coconut oil fat is nearly 50% *lauric acid*, which is converted by the body into *monolaurin* and makes coconut oil effective in treating many bacterial and fungal infections such as candida, athlete's foot, measles, influenza, and hep C. Another source of monolaurin is human breast milk, go figure!

Another reason coconut oil has so many benefits is because unlike most other fats and oils, it is comprised of medium-chain fatty acids, (MCFA's), which are smaller fat molecules metabolised in the liver and immediately absorbed and converted into energy, kind of like glucose but without the insulin spike. Other fats and oils are made up of long chain fatty acids, or long-chain triglycerides, which are larger molecules that are difficult for your body to break down and are mainly stored as fat. The MCFA's in coconut oil actually boost your metabolism and help your body use fat for energy, which can lead to weight loss, Type 2 diabetes risk reduction, increase in energy, accelerated healing and improved immunity.

When it comes to your skin, coconut oil is very hydrating and keeps skin's connective tissues strong, which prevents sagging and wrinkles.

Types of Coconut Oil
Refined coconut oil
- Made from dried coconut, also known as copra; the standard end product made from dried kernel (meat) is RBD oil, which stands for *refined, bleached and deodorised*. The reason the oil has to undergo this process is that the dried copra is not fit for consumption and the oil needs to undergo processes to filter out impurities and to make it more stable; its a pretty common way to mass-produce coconut oil.
- Because its refined its fairly tasteless and doesn't smell like coconut; it can withstand higher cooking temperatures before it reaches its smoke point; used for deep-frying foods without the flavour of coconut.
- Most of the coconut oils available in grocery stores and health stores are refined unless they specifically state otherwise; not all refined oils are created equal so try to get good quality, non-hydrogenated (yep, even coconut oil can be hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated but mainly in tropical, Asian countries), and refined using natural, chemical free process like steam or diatomaceous earth.

Unrefined coconut oil – (the one I recommend)
- Usually labelled as 'virgin' or 'extra-virgin', this coconut oil is made from the first pressing of fresh, raw coconut using mechanical means without the addition of any chemicals; depending on the extraction method, the flavour can be mild to very intense (more heat exposure during extraction, more coconut flavour in the oil).
- *Good raw, unrefined, virgin coconut oil should have a very mild coconut flavour and scent.*
- Virgin, unrefined oil is more superior to refined coconut oil.

Extraction methods
Cold-pressed, expeller-pressed or centrifuged are methods of extracting oil from dry or fresh coconut and can be used for both refined and unrefined varieties. All methods can create good, healthy oil. Expeller-pressed and cold-pressed don't always mean 'raw' as sometimes these oils are heated to rather high temperatures during the extraction process, which is not a problem as coconut oil is a highly stable fat and will not go rancid. It does however mean that the flavour will be more coconutty. If you want a more mild and delicate coconut oil, look out for a centrifuged oil which is less likely to be exposed to heat during extraction.

Buying Coconut Oil
There are many brands out there and regardless of where you are, here are a few things to look out for:
1) Colour – white colour when it's solid and colourless when liquid, any discolouration might mean contamination and inferior quality. I am a little wary of too white as it may have been bleached.
2) Aroma and flavour – virgin, unrefined coconut oil should smell and taste like coconut but should not be overpowering and strong, if it smells roasted or smokey it means it's been exposed to a lot of heat and it might not retain as many nutrients; and if it's odourless and neutral tasting then it's most likely refined and treated.

Storing Coconut Oil
Coconut oil can be stored out of the fridge, away from direct sunlight, for up to two years. It will stay liquid in temperatures above 25C and will turn into butter and solid texture in lower temperatures or if refrigerated.

How to Use Coconut Oil?
There are hundreds of ways you can use coconut oil – in cooking, as part of your skincare routine, as part of flu and cold treatment, or to rub on cuts and bruises.
As far as how much coconut oil you should consume, most recommend 3-4 tablespoons of coconut oil for adults per day to achieve optimal results. It would be less for kids and those of you starting out with coconut oil or saturated fats in general. If you've been following a low fat diet and only now decided to transition to a higher fat intake, I would recommend to gradually build up the consumption of fat to avoid the initial diarrhoea you might experience along the way. So, starting with a teaspoon per day for a couple of weeks then 2 teaspoons etc.

Coconut oil as food

- I use coconut oil in cooking as it's very heat-stable. I fry and deep-fry in it, rub it on my roast meats, stir-fries and sauces. It's really good for Asian cooking as its flavour is very complimentary.
- It is a solid most of the time at room temperature or when refrigerated and is therefore a great substitute for butter or margarine and can be used for dips, spreads, in baking and desserts. Use 1 to 1 ratio when substituting other oils or butter for coconut oil. I use it in raw dessert or snack bar recipes.
- Add a couple of teaspoons to smoothies
- Refrigerate it and eat as is by scrapping some with a teaspoon. The taste is slightly sweet and subtle; it really is quite nice and doesn't have that oily texture you might expect, more like white chocolate.
- Mix some coconut oil with cacao & honey for a quick energy boost before a workout.

For your skin & hair

- Use it as a body moisturiser. Many women use it to improve and to prevent the appearance of stretch marks.
- Use it as a massage oil or bath oil, we add 4-5 tablespoons to a hot tub and your skin is wonderfully soft and moist after.
- Rub it into dry hair and wrap with a towel for a couple of hours before washing with shampoo.
- Use a little on your hair to remove frizz.
- Helps to heal skin after sunburn. Make sure to apply coconut oil after the initial heat burning sensation is gone.
- Believe it or not but rubbing some coconut oil on skin will also protect it from the sun, it has SPF4.
- Can be used as a natural antibacterial skin cream, an after-shave lotion, and to improve appearance of cellulite.
- Mix with salt or raw oats for a great skin exfoliator.
- Use as a safe baby lotion.
- Use on your hands after doing the dishes to avoid dry skin.
- Use on cuticles to help nails grow and rub into elbows to help with dry elbows.

Other uses

- It can be used as natural treatment to get rid of **head lice**. (You will need: A jar of coconut oil & a bottle of apple cider vinegar. First, rinse your hair with the vinegar, don't wash it out, leave it in until it dries. The vinegar dissolves the 'glue' which sticks the eggs to your hair follicles. When the vinegar has dried, pour coconut oil into your hair, making sure you get complete coverage. Cover your hair with a shower cap or hair wrap & leave it in for the whole day, as it will take a few hours for the coconut oil to smother & kill the lice. Comb your hair to get as many of the eggs & lice out as possible and then shampoo as normal. You only have to do this once, it really works & no chemicals! Oh, & the coconut oil makes your hair beautiful & shiny, so you're getting a lush hair treatment at the same time!)
- Rub a little on wounds and cuts to promote healing and avoid infection.
- Given its antifungal properties, the oil can be used on feet to fight athlete's foot or tor fungus.
- Applied externally, it can help pets struggling with skin issues.
- You can make a homemade vapour rub by mixing half a cup of coconut oil with a few drops of eucalyptus and rosemary oils to rub on the chest and throat.
- Make a homemade toothpaste – recipes on the internet
- Do OIL Pulling for healthy gum and teeth
- Some have used topically to kill yeast or yeast infections.
- Rub on cold sores to speed healing and prevent bacteria from growing.
- Use to season cast iron skillets and frying pans