

Olive Oil - The Facts

Research suggests that eating around 2tbsp of (virgin or extra virgin) olive oil a day can improve cholesterol regulation, reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and it has even been linked to prevention of cancer. This is because it is packed with anti-oxidants and has a high content of mono-saturated fatty acids. But not all olive oils are the same and it helps to know a bit about how to find good quality oils. Here are six handy facts.

1: Just like wine, olive oils are awarded different labels and grades depending on their taste, production methods, origin and chemistry. For example, in Italy the same labels as wine are awarded to olive oils: 'Protected denomination of origin' (DOC) and 'denomination of controlled origin' labels (DOCG).

2: When you buy 'Extra Virgin' olive oil, this means it is produced without the use of any chemicals, contains no more than 0.8% acidity and is judged to have a superior taste. Virgin olive oil is also produced solely by the use of physical means and its acidity is less than 2%, with a good taste.

3: Some of the world's best extra virgin olive oil comes from the Chianti region of Tuscany where single estate bottled oils are the most sought after and expensive of all. For a first-hand experience, it is possible to stay in a [villa in Tuscany](#) where this type of oil is produced from olive trees on the grounds.

4: Cold pressed olive oil means the olive pulp created during the olive production process is pressed below 27 degrees to ensure the minimum flavour is lost. It is of better quality than olive oil that has not been cold pressed.

5: Light, heat and air reduce the quality of olive oil, so it is best kept in a sealed, tinted glass bottle and stored in a cool place.

6: Unlike wine, olive oil does not get better with age. Good quality olive oil should be used within a year. Lower grade oils only have a shelf life of a few months.

