

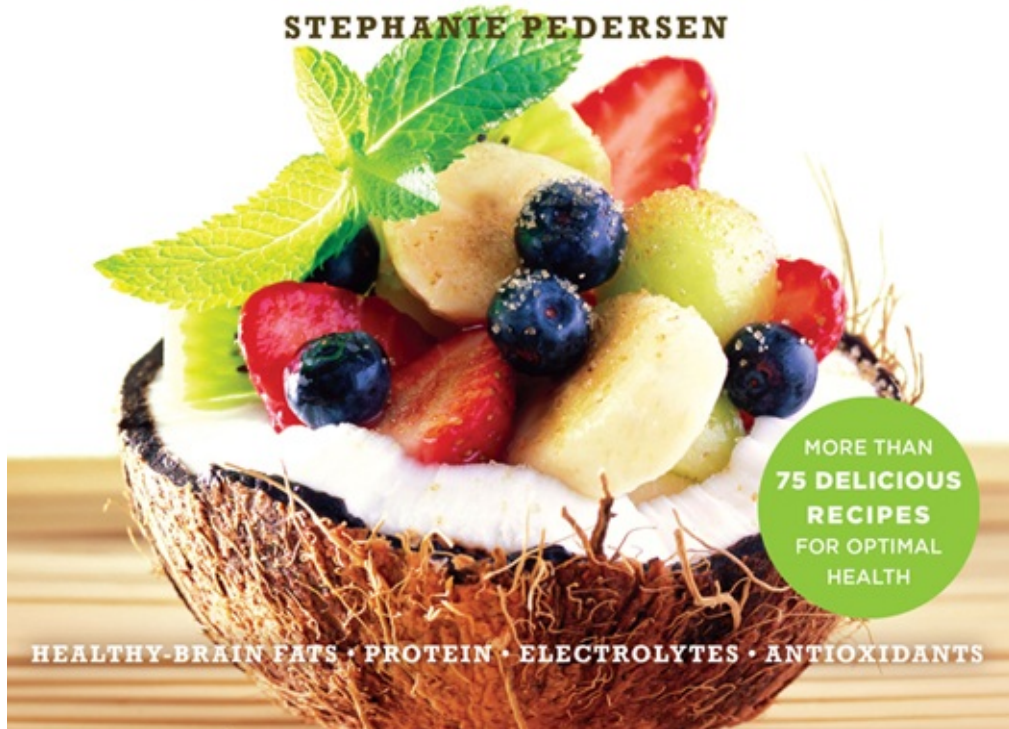
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# Coconut

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The Complete Guide to the  
World's Most Versatile Superfood

**STEPHANIE PEDERSEN**



MORE THAN  
**75 DELICIOUS  
RECIPES**  
FOR OPTIMAL  
HEALTH

HEALTHY-BRAIN FATS • PROTEIN • ELECTROLYTES • ANTIOXIDANTS

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*To my guys: Leif Christian Pedersen,  
Anders Gyldenvalde Pedersen, Axel SuneLund Pedersen,  
and Richard Joseph Demler. I adore you.*

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**STEPHANIE PEDERSEN**





An Imprint of Sterling Publishing  
1166 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10036

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ISBN 978-1-4549-1634-5

[www.sterlingpublishing.com](http://www.sterlingpublishing.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

**As a young girl I lived in Australia, a place where coconuts are everywhere, even though they are not native to Australia and are not grown commercially there. In fact, they grow only sparsely along Oz's northern coast ... and yet, Australians eat coconuts in large quantities. Yes, Aussies are coconut lovers. Go Down Under and you'll find the famous Anzac biscuits, coconut shortbread, lamingtons (small squares of cake dipped in chocolate and coated with coconut), coconut sponge, baked coconut pudding, Cherry Ripe chocolate bars (with cherries and coconut), and my favorite, Europe Apricot & Coconut bars, as well as other coconut-heavy sweets.**

For me, as I was growing up, coconut was a delectable, sweet food that I associated with good times and treats. I didn't used to think of it as an ingredient that could be eaten in a wide range of dishes. And I certainly didn't grow up with the idea that coconut was good for you.

I was a child in the 1970s and '80s, a time of margarine, aspartame, and no-fat diets. Most people in Australia, the United States, and Europe (the cultures my family and I lived in) had never heard of coconut water, and we certainly didn't cook with coconut oil. The only dried coconut we ever saw was coated with sweetener and packaged in a blue plastic bag. And the idea of cooking with flour that wasn't made from wheat seemed unthinkable. In other words, it was a different time. In fact, I didn't see an actual, mature coconut until I was in my late teens, when my dad brought one home after winning it as a gag gift at work. It was only when I became an adult, and began regularly traveling to the West Indies, that I laid eyes upon a green coconut for the first time.

I don't think my coconut experience—or lack thereof—was uncommon.

My mother got her nutrition information from women's magazines, which told her that saturated fats were the enemy—so out went red meat and butter. Tropical oils were shunned, too; nutrition experts from that time told us coconut oil was the most dangerous fat possible. Thus, entire generations grew up without coconut oil and ate foods made with *more acceptable* hydrogenated vegetable shortening and margarine instead.

The first time I was exposed to thinking about alternative fats was in my twenties, when I was working in New York City as a kitchen assistant at the Natural Gourmet Institute, the renowned whole foods cooking school, where revolutionary natural food chefs such as Peter Brearley, Myra Kornfeldt, Elliott Prag, and Diane Carlson taught. My job was twofold: to help cooking instructors get ready for class by prepping ingredients, and to ensure that their classes ran smoothly by performing the backstage work (everything from fetching ingredients for the instructor to washing dishes).

One particular day, during an introductory lesson on whole food ingredients, instructor Diane Carlson mentioned that studies were beginning to show that coconut oil and other coconut products had powerful healing properties and were not harmful to the heart, as many people believed at the time. She passed around a few handouts on heart disease rates in Southeast Asian and West Indian countries, where coconut oil, coconut milk, and coconut meat were consumed in large quantities, as opposed to Canada and the United States, where consumption of hydrogenated vegetable shortening and margarine were the norm. The studies showed that Southeast Asian and West Indian heart disease rates were low compared to those of the Western world.

This was new.

Wanting to get every drop of wisdom we could get on coconut oil, we kitchen assistants leapt into

action: One of us took frantic notes while the rest of us continued chopping, stirring, and washing dishes.

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After the class was over and we'd cleaned the kitchen, we raced to a copy shop to photocopy our notes. We had a quest: find out everything we could about coconut oil.

We searched the cooking school's library shelves and pored over back issues of every healing and natural food magazine we could find. A few of us hit the public library. These were the early days of the Internet, so hopping online, as all of us did, and searching for "Coconut Oil," led us straight to a bunch of alternative health websites that were so zealous, we couldn't be sure where enthusiasm wore off and accuracy began.

What I was looking for was reassurance—proof, even—that I was not going to doom myself to a life of heart disease by regularly consuming coconut. Finally, I felt that I'd read enough; I was convinced that the product was not health threatening, and I was ready to take the plunge. Unfortunately, finding coconut oil proved to be more challenging than unearthing reliable research.

One of my friends brought back an unmarked jar of coconut oil from a trip to Barbados. She had no idea if it was cold-pressed or if the coconut that was used to make the oil was organic, but at last we had some! We split the oil among the three of us and took it home.

The first thing I did with the coconut oil was make a vegetable curry, which I finished off with a cup of coconut milk. I figured if coconut oil was good for me, coconut milk must be, too! I had been using extra-virgin olive oil for everything prior to this; the coconut oil made the dish taste so much more authentic. It was absolutely delicious.

I used the oil every day, until it ran out, to bake, roast veggies, and make salad dressings. I even used it to make popcorn and rubbed it into my hair and skin, like many of my friends from "coconut countries" did. I had found a new love. I adored the well-rounded, nutty, buttery flavor that coconut oil brought to everything I cooked, and was in awe of all the protein, fiber, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, potassium, zinc, vitamin C, B-complex vitamins, phytonutrients, fatty acids, amino acids, electrolytes, and antimicrobial elements this nourishing food contains.

In those early days at the Natural Gourmet Institute, my experimentation with coconut showed me that it is indeed a powerful and delicious everyday ingredient. I began by using a range of coconut products, including coconut milk, dried coconut, and fresh green and mature brown coconuts. I tried coconut water for the first time, and started to make my own coconut milk and dry my own shredded coconut. Later, when the gluten-free movement started and coconut flour became available, I jumped at the chance to play with another coconut ingredient. And when I discovered coconut nectar and coconut sugar, I pulled out my muffin tins and began to experiment. But experimentation didn't stop there; when I stumbled upon coconut vinegar and coconut aminos, out came the blender, allowing me to whip up a flurry of marinades, sauces, and dressings.

Today I enjoy coconut, in one form or another, at almost every meal. I use coconut water to make ice cubes and rely on coconut milk to replace dairy in just about every single recipe I make. I have been known to sneak coconut oil into my dog's food to treat his itchy skin, and have even used coconut butter, whipped with coconut nectar, to make an impromptu frosting for cupcakes. Even as I write this introduction, I have one hand on my keyboard and the other in a bowl of popcorn popped in coconut oil.

Along the way, I've learned a few wonderful things firsthand:

- Coconut oil, coconut meat, coconut flour, and coconut milk have reduced my cravings for sweets, probably by improving insulin secretion and utilization of blood glucose. The healthy fat in coconut



has been shown to slow elevations in blood sugar and reduce hypoglycemic cravings.

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- Coconut nectar and coconut sugar boast a low glycemic index, which leaves my kids happy, without the “sugar hyperactivity” they exhibit directly after eating anything made with cane sugar. Plus, there is no grouchy “post-sugar crash” with coconut sweeteners. For me, this alone makes coconut a miracle ingredient.
- Coconut improves immune system function. Before I added coconut to my oldest son’s diet, he was getting sick from a virus almost every month. After adding two or three servings of coconut oil, coconut flour, and coconut milk to his everyday diet, he started catching only one or two colds a year, thanks to the antioxidant content of coconut.
- The antioxidant effects of coconut can help protect your skin from cellular damage from ultraviolet light, while the medium chain fatty acids in coconut help strengthen connective tissue—the results of which can be beautiful-looking skin.
- A naturopath friend mentioned that the medium chain fatty acids in coconut could help increase my metabolism and improve thyroid function while strengthening my sluggish adrenal gland function. A year after incorporating tablespoons of coconut oil into my diet each day, plus coconut water, coconut milk, and coconut flour most days, my adrenal gland function returned to normal.
- The electrolytes in coconut water help hydrate my husband on his runs in a more natural way than chemical-heavy sports drinks.
- Coconut flour and coconut meat contain generous amounts of fiber, which fills the tummy, leaving me so satisfied I’m not interested in after-meal snacking.

Although I have not suffered from a heart condition, high cholesterol, cancer, or a neurological disease, my research has uncovered several studies that suggest that coconut’s many nutrients help prevent and heal these conditions. One—the 2003 study performed by a team out of the School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition, McGill University in Quebec—found that overweight women who consumed a diet rich in medium chain fatty acids (the primary ingredient in coconut oil) enjoyed lowered cholesterol levels than those who received the majority of their fat from beef. (I come from a family of beef-eaters, so this study was of great interest to me!) A team at the same research site, after reviewing human and animal studies on coconut oil, and the medium chain fatty acids it contains, concluded that fats, such as coconut oil, that are rich in medium chain fatty acids may result in faster satiety and facilitate weight control when included in the diet as a replacement for fats containing long chain fatty acids—the fatty acids in animal and hydrogenated fats. Coconut is indeed a “superfood,” and a popular one at that. Check out any raw food, Paleo, or gluten-free blog; vegan restaurant; vegetarian magazine; or alternative health website, and you’ll find anecdotal proof that coconut is the darling of the health set.

I have my own unofficial proof that coconut is one of the health world’s most popular power foods. When I began writing *Coconut*, I quizzed my nutritionist and natural health friends on the foods they eat every single day (at least once, if not two or three times a day) to stay healthy. Coconut was the only food that all 226 of them ate daily in some form or another. Furthermore, each September I host the Superfood Superheroes Summit, an online education event, during which I spend a week



interviewing superfood authors and other experts. Last year when I asked each health pro to share a recipe, the only superfood ingredient that every single expert's recipe included was coconut. That's pretty telling, right?

No matter how you crack it, coconut tastes amazing, is easy to find, and is wonderful for use in a staggering array of delicious recipes, from smoothies and juices to main dishes and little dishes, to baked goods and desserts—complete with the lovely bonus of health benefits that will keep you and your family as healthy and vibrant as possible. Taste, versatility, and health benefits—how many ingredients do you know that offer as many desirable qualities?

If you are ready to dive in and experience the wonders of coconut yourself, you'll find everything you need to get started in this book. In Chapter 1, you'll be introduced to this amazing fruit, learning everything you need to know about where coconut is from, how we use it, and its illustrious history. Chapter 2 summarizes all of the coconut products that are available (and there are a lot of them!); explains what you need to know about using these products; and highlights the health benefits of each. Chapters 3 through 8 are devoted to recipes—all of the delicious and healthy dishes featuring coconut that you can make for everything from breakfast, lunch, dinner, and desserts to snacks and beverages (including amazing juices and smoothies.) Chapter 9 shares some of my favorite beauty recipes, including whipped coconut moisturizer and tinted lip balm. If you are a DIYer, chapter 10 is for you: Here you'll find out how to create some fun cleaning products for your home that are good for both you and the environment. In the FAQs in chapter 11, I answer the most commonly asked (and sometimes quirky) questions about individual coconut ingredients and products. Finally, in the resources section, I share my favorite places to get high-quality coconut ingredients and coconut-based clothing and house goods, as well as websites where you can get the most up-to-the-minute information about coconut and other superfoods.

Throughout this book, you'll find plenty of tips on choosing, using, and storing your precious coconut ingredients, as well as tricks to help you make your own coconut staples. (Anyone want to know how to make Coconut Cream Dessert Topping or homemade coconut milk?) I've tried to keep the recipes as healthy as possible, which in my world means whole food ingredients, a minimum of dairy and wheat, and lots of plant food. If applicable, substitutions and alternative options are noted within the recipe, along with details about any unusual steps or storage advice.

It's a great time for coconut, and if you are ready to dive in and experience the wonders of coconut yourself, it's all here.

With love and coconut bliss to all of you  
Stephanie Pedersen, MS, CHHC, AADP Holistic Nutritionist





# GETTING FRIENDLY WITH COCONUT

**Hello coconut lovers! I am so excited to share one of my favorite superfoods with you, as well as welcome all of you healthy folks who have heard that coconut is a great way to boost your health and make sure your family gets the nutrition they need to be their best. And friendly greetings to those of you who are not coconut fans, but are here because you love someone who loves coconut or because your doctor or nutritionist told you that you need to eat more coconut.**

Coconut comes in many different forms, including coconut water, fresh coconut meat, dried coconut meat, coconut oil, coconut milk, coconut flour, coconut sweeteners, coconut vinegar, and more. I hope you'll try them all. You may be like me and love every single one of these, or you may prize one ingredient above the rest. While coconut flour has different benefits than coconut water, which in turn, has a different nutrient profile than coconut oil, all coconut foods are worthy additions to your daily diet.

That's what I tell my clients: Try for at least one coconut product every day. Each coconut product has a different host of nutrients. If you can enjoy at least one coconut product every day, you'll end each week in a powerful, healthful place.

## COCONUT'S ANCIENT ORIGINS

One of the earliest descriptions of the coconut palm was written in about 545 CE, in *Topographia Christiana*, a work by Cosmas, who made several trips to India and was famous for his maps of the world.

Still, the origins of the coconut remain a mystery: Scientists have used art, fossils, genetics, and travel records to figure out where the coconut first appeared.

Odoardo Beccari, a renowned palm specialist during the late 1800s and early 1900s, suggested that the coconut is of Southeast Pacific origin. Strengthening his argument is the fact that there are more varieties of coconut palms in the Eastern Hemisphere than in the Americas. However, no conclusive evidence exists, so for now, we'll have to be content with coconut's great taste, versatility, and health benefits.

As you've probably already noticed, coconut is absolutely everywhere! Coconut oil, which was, at one time, relegated to skin care, has been a hot food for decades now, as more and more families of autistic children and Alzheimer's patients have touted its ability to help normalize brain and nervous system function. At the same time, cardiologists and others who are concerned with heart health have found coconut to be effective in helping heal cardiovascular disorders, while IBS (irritable bowel



syndrome) sufferers and individuals with other digestive disorders have found coconut oil to be helpful in healing their damaged large intestine.

Coconut water, the fastest-growing beverage in the world, first appeared in US supermarkets in 2004. The popularity of this refreshing drink is borne out by these statistics from the data resource company Euromonitor: Sales of the highest-selling brands in the United States—Vita Coco, ZICO, and O.N.E., which control the vast majority of the American coconut water market—have skyrocketed by nearly 600 percent since 2009, and 2,759 percent since 2007.

### IS COCONUT A FRUIT, A NUT, A SEED ... OR WHAT?

Botanically speaking, the coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) is not exclusively a fruit or a nut. It is classified as a fibrous one-seeded drupe. I know, I had to look up “drupe,” too: A drupe is a fruit with a tough protective covering that encloses the seed (like a peach or an olive). The word is derived from the Latin *drupa*, meaning overripe olive.

Coconut milk is now available in convenient cartons right next to dairy milk, and has become a favorite of vegans and others who “don’t do” dairy. In the United Kingdom, sales of nondairy alternatives (including coconut milk) have risen by 40 percent in the last three years—with similar numbers in the United States. Coconut flour, too, has grown in popularity, thanks to the rising number of gluten-free consumers and individuals who follow the Paleo diet, which eschews grains and grain-based flours in favor of high-fiber, high-protein, low-carbohydrate whole foods that nourish the body without causing bloat and inflammation.

The high reputation of low glycemic coconut sugar and coconut nectar, as alternatives to other sugars, has arrived hot on the heels of data released by the American Diabetes Association that shows nearly twenty-six million children and adults in the United States have diabetes and seventy-nine million Americans have prediabetes. These individuals must find ways to eat that don’t cause dangerous fluctuations in their blood sugar—their lives literally depend upon it.

### COCONUTS COULD ALSO BE ...

Some scientists refer to the coconut as a seed. If you remember high school biology, a seed is the reproductive unit of a flowering plant that contains a “baby” plant. When the coconut germinates, a shoot emerges from one of its three “eyes.” For more fascinating information on the botanical classification of the coconut, visit <http://waynesword.palomar.edu/ecoph8.htm>.

If you’ve been motivated to find products like apple cider vinegar—with its alkalizing, anti-inflammatory powers—to help you feel energetic and craving-free, you’ll soon discover that coconut vinegar has the same superpowers. And, as more people become aware of the dangers of overusing soy, coconut aminos has become the go-to replacement for soy sauce and Bragg Liquid Aminos.

Last, there are coconut specialty products like coconut cream and coconut butter—even actual fresh young coconuts and mature coconuts—which add nutrient-dense luxury to even the most pious diet.

## **AND THE COCONUT PALM IS NOT A REAL TREE EITHER**

And now for another surprise: A coconut palm has no bark, no branches, and no secondary growth. It doesn't even have a proper trunk (instead it has a thick stem), which means it is not a tree. What it happens to be is a woody perennial monocotyledon.

No matter which coconut product you try, one of the best, foolproof ways to be sure you and your loved ones enjoy a daily serving of coconut is to start with the best-quality coconut products you can find. The first step in doing that is to “buy smart.”

Whether you are shopping for coconut milk or coconut vinegar, the fewer ingredients on the label the better. Like many other natural products, coconut milk, coconut flour, coconut water, and myriad other coconut products are often meddled with and altered with the addition of water, sweeteners, unnecessary flavorings, chemical preservatives, emulsifiers, stabilizers, anticaking agents, colorants, and more. None of these additives are necessary. Look for pure products in their most natural state and you will always do well.

## **COCONUT GROWING CONDITIONS**

The coconut palm loves sandy, salty soils and hot, humid, sunny locales. Just in case you're thinking of growing your own, coconut trees must have daily temperatures above 53.6 to 55.4°F every day of the year; annual rainfall above 39.37 inches; and direct sun with no or very little overhead canopy, since even small trees require direct sunlight.







# COCONUT: THE EVERYDAY POWERHOUSE

I call coconut an “everyday food” because it comes in so many forms and offers such a wide range of nutrients, so it’s easy—and smart—for you to enjoy daily. In my household, we eat coconut in one form or another at just about every meal and snack. This gives us a generous helping of the nutrients we need to stay healthy and keeps the adults in the household looking and feeling young, vibrant, and slim, while keeping all of our immune, cardiovascular, and nervous systems strong and efficient.

Fortunately, coconut comes in oils, sweeteners, sauces, flours, and more, making it a cinch to add coconut to our diet. Coconut is also easy to use and lends itself effortlessly to everything from popcorn to salad dressings to smoothies to dinner entrées.

This chapter is dedicated to giving you an idea of the wide range of coconut products that are available, and featured in the recipe section of the book. Here, you’ll learn more about the nutritional profile and health benefits of each product, where it comes from, and how it’s produced. I’ll also suggest tips and tricks for using each ingredient successfully. Enjoy!

## GREEN COCONUT

Up until recently, young, green coconuts were a rarity in the non-coconut-growing world. It was the brown, mature fruit that most of us associated with the word “coconut.” Thanks to the raw food and Paleo movements, green coconuts are a common sight in juice joints, health food stores, and supermarkets everywhere. Green coconuts are large and heavy and can be eaten raw: Just hack away the green coating, split it open, drain off the water (don’t throw it away, though!), and scoop out the young, gelatinous fruit. Young coconut flesh is slightly sweet and refreshing with a subtle richness, and best of all, it offers a wide range of nutrients.

### GREEN COCONUT: NUTRITION PROFILE PER SERVING (1 CUP)

**CALORIES:** 283

**FIBER:** A serving of fresh coconut provides 7.2 g of fiber, helping promote digestive health and helping you feel full so you eat less. Fiber has been found to lower the risk of certain cancers, such as colorectal cancer and other gastrointestinal cancers.

**PROTEIN:** At 2.66 g of coconut per serving, green coconut has a respectable amount of protein, the macronutrient responsible for helping your body build and repair itself.

**MEDIUM CHAIN FATTY ACIDS:** Like other coconut products, young coconut flesh contains medium chain fatty acids. MCFAs, as these are also known, have shown promise in reducing abdominal obesity and diminishing fat storage.

**LAURIC ACID:** Coconut flesh is also rich in lauric acid, which is known for its bacteria- and virus-killing properties. Lauric acid is also found in breast milk, helping boost newborns' immunity and protecting them against infections.

**POTASSIUM:** This mineral is crucial to body functions. One cup of green coconut flesh provides 285 mg of the recommended dietary allowance of about 4,700 mg.

### *RDAS, USDA, AND YOU*

In the United States, you often read about RDAs—recommended dietary allowances. Most nutrients are assigned an RDA by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This assigned number represents the ideal average daily intake of the nutrient. You'll find this number referred to as “RDA,” “recommended dietary allowance,” or “daily requirement.” The three terms are used interchangeably throughout this book.

**PHOSPHORUS:** Phosphorus is a mineral that makes up 1 percent of the body's total weight, and it is present in every cell of the body—particularly in bones and teeth. Adults need about 700 mg a day. A serving of young coconut provides 90 mg.

**CALCIUM:** In addition to its well-known role as bone-and-teeth-builder, calcium helps the body's muscles move and enables nerves to carry messages between the brain and other parts of the body. According to the USDA, an adult should get around 1,000 mg per day. Young coconut provides 11 mg per serving.

**MAGNESIUM:** Magnesium is needed for more than three hundred biochemical reactions in the body. It helps maintain normal nerve and muscle function, supports a healthy immune system, keeps the heartbeat steady, and helps bones remain strong. Adult women should get around 310 mg of magnesium daily (men should get 400 mg); one serving of young coconut flesh will supply 6 percent of the RDA for this important mineral.

### **NUTRIENTS: HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED?**

Name a nutrient—any nutrient—and chances are good that different people, of different ages and life stages, and of different genders, need different amounts of it. This is why the United States Department of Agriculture has created nutritional guidelines for most nutrients in the form of RDA (recommended dietary allowance) or AI (adequate intake). Here is a list of nutrients found in coconut products, along with the USDA's intake suggestions. Note: The USDA breaks down recommended dietary allowances into very narrow groups, as well as offering suggestions for larger, more general groups, some of which we share with you here.

## **FIBER**

---

men, over the age of 18: **38 g**

women, over the age of 18: **25 g**

pregnant women: **28 mg**

## **PROTEIN**

men, over the age of 18: **56 g**

women, over the age of 18: **26 g**

pregnant women: **71 g**

## **VITAMIN A**

men, over the age of 18: **900 IUs**

women, over the age of 18: **700 IUs**

pregnant women: **770 IUs**

## **VITAMIN B6**

men, over the age of 18: **1.3 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **1.3 mg**

pregnant women: **1.9 mg**

## **VITAMIN C**

men, over the age of 18: **90 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **75 mg**

pregnant women: **85 mg**

## **VITAMIN E**

men, over the age of 18: **15 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **15 mg**

pregnant women: **15 mg**

## **VITAMIN K**

men, over the age of 18: **120 g**

women, over the age of 18: **90 g**

pregnant women: **90 g**

## **FOLATE**

men, over the age of 18: **400 g**

women, over the age of 18: **400 g**

pregnant women: **600 g**

## **THIAMINE**

men, over the age of 18: **1.2 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **1.1 mg**

pregnant women: **1.4 mg**

### **RIBOFLAVIN**

men, over the age of 18: **1.3 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **1.1 mg**

pregnant women: **1.4 mg**

### **NIACIN**

men, over the age of 18: **16 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **14 mg**

pregnant women: **18 mg**

### **CALCIUM**

men, over the age of 18: **1,000 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **1,000 mg**

pregnant women: **1,000 mg**

### **IRON**

men, over the age of 18: **8 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **18 mg**

pregnant women: **27 mg**

### **MAGNESIUM**

men, over the age of 18: **400 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **310 mg**

pregnant women: **350 mg**

### **PHOSPHORUS**

men, over the age of 18: **700 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **700 mg**

pregnant women: **700 mg**

### **POTASSIUM**

men, over the age of 18: **4.7 g**

women, over the age of 18: **4.7 g**

pregnant women: **4.7 g**

### **ZINC**

men, over the age of 18: **11 mg**

women, over the age of 18: **8 mg**

pregnant women: **11 mg**

### **SELENIUM**

men, over the age of 18: **55 mcg**

women, over the age of 18: **55 mcg**

pregnant women: **60 mcg**

**IRON:** In addition to its role in red blood cell production, iron is necessary for growth, development, normal cellular functioning, and synthesis of some hormones and connective tissue. Young coconut provides 1.94 mg of the USDA recommended dietary allowance of 8 mg per day for men and 18 mg for women.

**MANGANESE:** Manganese is an essential nutrient involved in many chemical interactions in the body, including processing cholesterol, carbohydrates, and protein. It may also be involved in bone formation. While no recommended dietary allowance of manganese has been established by the USDA, or any other organization, 1 to 2 mg is considered an adequate daily dosage. Young coconut contains 1.2 mg of manganese per serving.

**ZINC:** Young coconut provides 0.88 mg of zinc per serving; the recommended dietary allowance is 8 mg for women and 11 mg for men. Zinc plays a role in immune function, protein synthesis, wound healing, DNA synthesis, and cell division.

**COPPER:** Low copper intake has been associated with high cholesterol and cardiovascular disease in some individuals. While the USDA has not yet determined a daily recommended dietary allowance, it considers 2 mg an adequate daily goal for adults. Young coconut provides 0.348 mg per serving.

**SELENIUM:** This trace element is necessary for several critical body functions, including reproduction, thyroid hormone metabolism, DNA synthesis, and protection from oxidative damage and infection. The USDA suggests that adults consume 55 mcg daily. Young coconut provides 8.1 mcg per 8-ounce serving.

**THIAMINE:** Also known as vitamin B1, thiamine helps the body's cells change carbohydrates into energy. Small amounts of thiamine are found in most foods, including young coconut, which contain 0.1 mg of the recommended dietary allowance of 1.1 mg for women and 1.2 mg for men.

## **HEALTH BENEFITS OF GREEN COCONUT**

While there are no specific studies on young green coconut, it has a long history of being used to help strengthen the sick and elderly and supply babies in coconut-producing countries with a healthy “first food.” Green coconut has also been used to improve the health and appearance of skin and hair.

## **CHOOSING, USING, AND KEEPING GREEN COCONUT**

When you are buying whole young coconuts, avoid cracks, mold, wet spots, and discoloration. When you pick up a coconut, it should feel heavy and actually sound as if it is filled with water. While the mature, brown coconuts can be kept at room temperature, green coconuts should be refrigerated and used within five days.

To open a green coconut, use a heavy chef's knife or (even better) a cleaver. Set the coconut on a flat surface and make four deep, straight cuts, each about two inches from the coconut's pointy top. Pry the top off and pour out the water.

*Caution: If you open a coconut and discover that the water is pink or smells sour, discard it. It has gone bad.*

For recipes in this book that call for fresh coconut, use young green coconuts from your local supermarket. Unfortunately, there is no surefire way to tell how old they are, so you may end up tossing a few. It happens to me, too!

### **GREEN COCONUTS: DID YOU KNOW ... ?**

- The flesh of the young coconut has more fiber than the same amount of apple.
- Peak months for fresh coconuts are October through December.
- It takes twelve to thirteen months for a coconut to mature fully.
- Coconuts grow in groups containing five to twelve fruits.
- A coconut palm produces about 100 to 120 coconuts a year.
- More than twenty billion coconuts are produced each year.
- The only two states in the United States where coconuts can grow are Hawaii and Florida—and only the southern part of Florida, at that.
- A coconut will not ripen after being picked.
- Falling coconuts kill 150 people every year, 10 times the number of people killed by sharks.
- The coconut is the largest seed in the world.
- The scientific name for the coconut palm is *Cocos nucifera*.

## **COCONUT WATER**

Coconuts contain a large quantity of “water,” filled with potassium, vitamins, and minerals. This health-supportive fluid has nourished humans for millennia. Coconut water has only recently become big business, however, and it is now popular with fitness buffs, endurance athletes, and advocates of raw food and the Paleo diet. Since coconut water first appeared in supermarkets in 2004, its popularity has not stopped climbing. According to Convenience Store News, sales increased by \$400 million in the United States in 2011 alone.

While I don't personally drink huge amounts of coconut water (my husband and two of my sons adore it!), I do use it as an ingredient in coolers and smoothies. I also give it to my kids when they're down with a stomach bug, and I appreciate how it makes me feel “normal” after an intense workout or even the morning after I've celebrated a bit too enthusiastically. (Coconut water really is the best hangover remedy I've come across—not that I've had to use it too often!)

### **COCONUT WATER: NUTRITION PROFILE PER SERVING (1 CUP)**

**CALORIES:** 46

**FIBER:** One serving of coconut water provides 3 g of fiber to help keep your digestive tract healthy, lower blood cholesterol, and help prevent colorectal cancer.

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

- **COCONUT WATER:** Coconut water is the clear liquid inside green coconuts. It's this liquid that you get when you buy coconut water in various kinds of packaging. Brown, mature coconuts often have a bit of watery liquid as well, but it often has a sour taste and isn't used as a beverage.
- **COCONUT MILK:** This is the liquid that comes from the grated meat of a brown coconut.
- **COCONUT FLESH:** "Flesh" is most often used to describe the almost gelatinous innards of green coconuts.
- **COCONUT MEAT:** "Meat" is what most culinary types call the creamy white innards of a brown coconut. Firm and rich, this is what many people think of when they think of coconuts. You may occasionally hear someone refer to this part of a brown coconut as "flesh," but "meat" is more commonly used.

**PROTEIN:** Protein is considered a macronutrient, which means that your body needs it in large amounts every day to perform everything from nutrient transport to cell repair. Coconut water provides 1.78 g of protein.

**AMINO ACIDS:** Coconut water contains small amounts of eighteen amino acids, which are the building blocks of protein. When digested, amino acids help the body create solid matter, including skin, eyes, heart, intestines, bones, and muscle.

**ENZYMES:** Coconut water contains enzymes, proteins that allow certain chemical reactions to take place much more quickly than they would on their own.

**VITAMIN C:** This is a water-soluble nutrient that acts as an antioxidant, helping protect cells from the damage caused by free radicals, the compounds formed when our bodies convert the food we eat into energy. A serving of coconut water provides 5.8 mg of a vitamin C.

**CALCIUM:** This mineral is necessary to maintain strong bones and healthy communication between the brain and various parts of the body. From a serving of coconut water, you'll get 58 mg of the mineral.

**COPPER:** Dietary copper is helpful in the production of red blood cells and assists with your sense of taste. While the USDA has not yet determined a daily recommended dietary allowance, it considers 2 mg an adequate daily goal for adults. A serving of coconut water provides about 96 mcg of copper.

**IRON:** While not overly abundant in iron, a serving of coconut water will give your body about 0.94 mg of the daily requirement for this mineral. Iron is necessary for cell growth, normal cellular functioning, and synthesis of some hormones and connective tissue.

**MANGANESE:** You'll get 0.3 mg of manganese, a mineral that helps you metabolize both fat and protein, from coconut water. Manganese also supports both the immune and nervous systems and promotes stable blood sugar levels.

**MAGNESIUM:** One serving of coconut water delivers about 60 mg of your daily requirement of magnesium, a mineral responsible for many biochemical functions in the body, including regulating the heart's rhythm and supporting the function of nerve cells. Magnesium is a major electrolyte that



helps maintain proper fluid levels in the body and regulate muscle function.

**SELENIUM:** You'll get 60 mg of in each serving of coconut water. This nutrient plays critical roles in reproduction, thyroid hormone metabolism, DNA synthesis, and protection from oxidative damage and infection.

**SODIUM:** A mineral that is also an electrolyte, sodium helps maintain proper fluid levels in the body and regulate muscle function. There are 252 mg of sodium in a cup of coconut water.

**PHOSPHORUS:** Responsible for creating some of the energy that you use every day, phosphorus also assists your body in synthesizing proteins, fats, and carbohydrates, and regulates the fluid levels in your body. You'll get 48 mg with each serving of coconut water.

**POTASSIUM:** You'll get a whopping 600 mg of potassium in a serving of coconut water. This essential mineral, a major electrolyte, helps maintain proper fluid levels in the body and regulate muscle function. It also plays an important role in nerve function and blood pressure.

**ZINC:** Found in cells throughout the body, zinc helps the immune system fight off invading bacteria and viruses. The body also needs zinc to make proteins and DNA, the genetic material in all cells. A serving of coconut water provides 0.2 mg of the mineral.

## HEALTH BENEFITS OF COCONUT WATER

**DIABETES PREVENTION:** In the December 8, 2011, issue of the *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, a study conducted by the Department of Pharmaceutical Technology at Jadavpur University in Kolkata, India showed that diabetic animals that had been fed an extract of coconut water showed a significant reduction in fasting blood glucose levels compared with a diabetic control group. Other studies have shown similar results, leading to the hypothesis that coconut water might be an antidiabetic.

**ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE:** A study conducted in late 2010 by a research team from Prince of Songkla University in Hat Yai, Thailand, found that daily consumption of coconut water can help prevent the onset of Alzheimer's disease in menopausal women. Using menopausal rats, researchers studied brain abnormalities associated with Alzheimer's. After giving the rats coconut water, these abnormalities lessened considerably. Preliminary studies on young coconut juice (YJC) have reported the presence of estrogen-like components.

**HYPERTENSION:** A 2005 study by a team from the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, Trinidad, selected twenty-eight individuals with hypertension and divided them into three groups. Each group was assigned a specific drink; included were bottled drinking water, coconut water, and mauby fruit juice. The drinks were consumed daily for two weeks. At the end of the study, the group that received coconut water experienced a 71 percent decrease in systolic blood pressure and a 29 percent decrease in diastolic blood pressure.

**HYDRATION:** Several studies have pitted coconut water against commercially available sports drinks. For some people, coconut water seems to be a healthier alternative to these chemical-laden drinks. If you're one of them, you'll be interested in a study that was published in the *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition*, January 18, 2012. Following a sixty-minute bout of dehydrating treadmill exercise, twelve exercise-trained men received bottled water, pure coconut water, coconut water from concentrate, or a carbohydrate-electrolyte sports drink on four occasions, separated by at least five days, in a random order. Hydration status (body mass, fluid retention, plasma osmolality, urine specific gravity) and performance (treadmill time to exhaustion; assessed after

rehydration) were determined during the recovery period.

No differences were noted between coconut water, coconut water from concentrate, or the sports drink on any occasion. It was determined that all three beverages were capable of promoting rehydration and supporting subsequent exercise. That said, coconut water contains significantly less sodium than a leading commercial Gatorade-type sports drink. If sodium is a health concern for you, you'll find a way to create a special coconut water-based [sports drink](#).

## CHOOSING, USING, AND KEEPING COCONUT WATER

When purchasing packaged coconut water, look at the list of ingredients. If it contains sweeteners, flavorings, and/or other additives, pass it by. You want pure, unadulterated coconut water. Always refrigerate any container of coconut water that you've opened and use it within one or two days—or freeze it for longer storage.

*Caution: You'll definitely know when coconut water is spoiled—it has a sour taste and smell.*

**STEPHANIE'S FAVORITE WAY TO USE COCONUT WATER:** To make ice cubes.

### COCONUT WATER: DID YOU KNOW ... ?

- Ten years ago, the first-ever patent granted to a UN agency was awarded to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to bottle coconut water in a way that preserves its nutrients.
- Coconut water contains the same five electrolytes found in human blood. (Gatorade has only two of these electrolytes.)
- The three top-selling coconut water brands in the United States are ZICO (owned by Coca-Cola), O.N.E. (owned by Pepsi), and Vita Coco (which counts pop singer Madonna as a primary investor).
- Each coconut may contain about 200 to 1,000 mL of water depending on cultivar type and size.
- The water from coconuts that are five months old or younger tastes bitter and is low in nutrients.
- Coconut water needs to be kept out of sunlight. UV light causes coconut water to oxidize and lose nutrients.
- Coconut water is used as a supplement to breast milk in many coconut-growing countries.
- Coconut water in recipes: In the recipes in this book, I use coconut water from fresh green coconuts, or from one of several brands of no-additive, unflavored coconut water.

## MATURE COCONUT

Round, brown, and rough, with three eyes on top: That's how most of us picture coconuts. The meat of a mature coconut is white, firm, and rich—different in texture from the flesh of green coconuts, with

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