

Top 7 Kitchen Essentials

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✓ Fact Checked

August 02, 2022

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Healthy cooking oils and dietary fats to stock your kitchen with include coconut oil, grass fed butter, organic ghee, lard, tallow and extra-virgin olive oil
- › Homemade bone broth speeds healing and recuperation from illness, promotes gut health, fights inflammation, supports joint health, promotes weight loss, and improves sleep and brain function
- › Apple cider vinegar is rich in bioactive components that give it potent antioxidant, antimicrobial and many other beneficial properties
- › Top spices for flavor and medicinal properties include Himalayan salt, Indian long pepper, turmeric, cumin, ginger and mustard seed
- › Use ceramic knives to prevent browning, ceramic pots and pans to avoid exposure to toxins and dangerous metals, glass food storage containers to avoid plastic chemicals, and separate cutting boards for meat and produce to prevent pathogenic cross-contamination

This article was previously published January 28, 2019, and has been updated with new information.

Eating well and taking care of your health is easier when you have the right ingredients and utensils on hand at all times. Following are some top essentials with which to stock your kitchen – healthy fats, medicinal and health-promoting spices that can be added to

a wide variety of dishes, and nontoxic utensils to avoid unnecessary exposures to toxins and harmful pathogens.

1. Healthy Fats and Cooking Oils

While dietary fats are an incredibly important part of a healthy diet, it's crucial to understand which are healthy and which are not. Processed industrial vegetable oils are best avoided at all times, as they're typically made with genetically engineered grains contaminated with glyphosate, and are prone to oxidation and produce dangerous byproducts when heated.¹ Instead, stock your kitchen with the following healthy cooking oils and dietary fats:

- **Coconut oil** — This is what I believe is the best cooking oil. It has a number of valuable health benefits, including a positive effect on your heart and antimicrobial properties. It's also a great source of energy, thanks to its medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs). When consumed, the MCFAs are digested and converted by your liver into energy that you can immediately use. Coconut oil also helps stimulate your metabolism to encourage a healthy weight profile.

As an added boon, coconut oil has countless other uses besides cooking and eating, from topical beauty applications to first aid treatments, to general household cleaning. Make sure you choose an organic coconut oil that is unrefined, unbleached, made without heat processing or chemicals.

- **Grass fed butter** — Raw, organic butter made from healthy grass fed cows' milk contains many valuable nutrients, including vitamins A, D, E and K2, along with minerals and antioxidants that support good health. Recent research² has also noted that organic grass fed dairy has a "near-perfect" balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fats, as well as higher amounts of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), which can help reduce your cardiovascular and metabolic disease risks.
- **Organic ghee** — Ghee, also known as clarified butter, differs from regular butter in that it has fewer dairy proteins, making it a better choice for those with lactose

sensitivity or intolerance. Starting with pure butter made from cow's milk, the ghee-making process involves heating and separating liquid fats from the milk solids, which become caramelized, and removing the milk solids, which also removes most of the lactose.

Ghee is darker and has a nuttier flavor than butter, and with a higher smoke point, it's a healthier option for sautéing. It also has a longer shelf life, lasting for around six months in the refrigerator or up to a year in the freezer. Ghee has been used in traditional cooking in India, Pakistan and Southeast Asia for thousands of years. It's also an Ayurvedic go-to for herbal ointments, massage and as a medicinal to remedy rashes and burns.

- **Lard and tallow** — Tallow is a hard fat that comes from cows. Lard is a hard fat that comes from pigs. They're both animal fats, and were historically two main fats used in cooking.
- **Olive oil** — This oil contains healthy fatty acids that can help lower your risk of heart disease. While the standard recommendation has been to avoid using olive oil for cooking and to only use it cold, recent research³ in which 10 popular cooking oils were compared contradicts this advice, showing extra-virgin olive oil actually scored best for both oxidative stability and lack of harmful compounds produced when heated.

A word of caution is warranted, however. Fake olive oil abounds, so it's important to take the time to investigate your sources. Tests in 2010 suggested that much of the olive oils sold in American grocery stores and restaurants were adulterated with cheap vegetable oils or nonhuman-grade olive oils, which are harmful to health in a number of ways.

While this was more than a decade ago, clearly you still need to read labels and look for key certifications that assure the oil is pure.⁴

2. Homemade Broth

Homemade bone broth is excellent for speeding healing and recuperation from illness, as it helps "heal and seal" your gut. Physicians harkening as far back as Hippocrates have associated bone broth with gut healing.

It also helps fight inflammation, supports joint health, promotes weight loss, improves sleep and brain function, and is a good source of not only healthy fat but also many important vitamins and minerals, including:

Calcium	Magnesium
Phosphorous	Silicon
Sulfur	Trace minerals
Chondroitin sulphates	Glucosamine

Bone broth, in its simplest form, is made using animal bones, vinegar and spices. It is simmered in a pot or slow cooker at least overnight, or as long as 24 to 72 hours.

Longer simmering times result in a more complete release of gelatin, minerals and other nutrients from the bones, which is key to realizing the many health-giving benefits and restorative properties this broth has to offer. Making your own bone broth is extremely cost effective, as you can make use of leftover carcass bones that would otherwise be thrown away.

One important caveat when making broth, whether you're using chicken or beef, is to make sure they're from organically-raised, pastured or grass-fed animals.

3. Apple Cider Vinegar

Traditionally, apple cider vinegar is made through a long, slow fermentation process that renders it rich in bioactive components like acetic acid, gallic acid, catechin,

epicatechin, caffeic acid and more, giving it potent antioxidant, antimicrobial and many other beneficial properties.

"Mother" of vinegar, a cobweb-like amino acid-based substance found in unprocessed, unfiltered vinegar, indicates your vinegar is of the best quality. Most manufacturers pasteurize and filter their vinegar to prevent the mother from forming, but the "murky" kind is actually best, especially if you're planning to consume it.

With its wide variety of health benefits, a jug of raw, unfiltered apple cider vinegar is easily one of the most economical and versatile remedies around. I recommend keeping it in your home at all times. Some of the health benefits associated with apple cider vinegar consumption include:

Blood sugar control — Vinegar is said to be antiglycemic and has a beneficial effect on your blood sugar, likely due to its acetic acid content, which prevents the complete digestion of complex carbohydrates. Another theory is that vinegar helps inactivate digestive enzymes that break down carbohydrates into sugar, thus slowing the conversion of complex carbohydrate into sugar, preventing a spike by giving you more time to pull sugar out of your blood.

There are studies supporting the use of vinegar as a diabetic treatment as well. One study⁵ found vinegar treatment improved insulin sensitivity in 19% of individuals with type 2 diabetes and 34% of those with prediabetes.

Heart health — Polyphenols such as chlorogenic acid help inhibit oxidation of LDL cholesterol,⁶ while acetic acid helps lower blood pressure.⁷ Vinegar has also been shown to lower triglyceride levels and VLDL (very low density lipoprotein) cholesterol in animals.⁸

Weight management — Vinegar may aid weight loss by increasing satiety, another effect attributed to acetic acid. For instance, when volunteers consumed a small amount of vinegar along with a high-carb meal (a bagel and juice) they consumed less food for the remainder of the day. The reduction equated to about 200 to 275

calories a day – an amount that would result in a monthly weight loss of up to 1.5 pounds.⁹

Sinus congestion – Apple cider vinegar's ability to break up and reduce mucus in your body can help clear your sinuses. It also has antibacterial properties, making it useful for infections. Here's what to do:¹⁰

Directions

1. Add one-half teaspoon to 1 teaspoon of apple cider vinegar to a cup of warm filtered water. Stir until thoroughly mixed.
2. Using a neti pot, pour the mixture into one nostril at a time, while plugging the other nostril with the other hand.

Sore throat – The antibacterial properties of apple cider vinegar may be useful for sore throats as well. Gargle with a mixture of about one-third cup of apple cider vinegar mixed with warm water as needed. Apple cider vinegar with honey and ginger for a sore throat is also a popular and effective remedy. Another mixture for sore throat, recommended by Bonnie K. McMillen, a nurse from the University of Pittsburgh, includes:¹¹

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon raw honey
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- Optional: 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Digestive ailments — Acid reflux typically results from a lack of stomach acid. You can easily improve the acid content of your stomach by taking 1 tablespoon of raw unfiltered apple cider vinegar in a large glass of water daily. The pectin in apple cider vinegar may also help to soothe intestinal spasms. For everyday gut health, a mixture of 2 teaspoons of apple cider vinegar with 1 teaspoon of raw honey in 1 cup of warm water can help.

Skin irritations and warts — Apple cider vinegar also works for a variety of skin ailments, from bug bites and poison ivy to sunburn and even warts. You can either apply it directly to the irritated area or try soaking in a bath with about 1 cup of vinegar added. For warts, soak a cotton ball in vinegar and apply it to the wart, covered, overnight. Repeat until the wart disappears.

Energy boost — Apple cider vinegar contains potassium and enzymes to help banish fatigue. Plus, its amino acids may help prevent the buildup of lactic acid in your body, further preventing fatigue.¹²

Detox and immune support — Studies have shown apple cider vinegar can be beneficial for liver detoxification and helps cleanse your lymphatic system, which can contribute to improved immune system response. According to *The Truth About Cancer*:¹³

"Cider vinegar was ... determined to be a strong antimicrobial agent ... One of the most fatal bacterium, Mycobacterium tuberculosis, is resistant to disinfectants but is found to be killed by acetic acid. Especially in patients who are immunosuppressed, apple cider vinegar is an excellent natural antimicrobial tonic to rid of harmful bacteria and provide immune support."

Candida — Candida overgrowth in your gut has been linked to many different health issues, including yeast infections, fatigue, poor memory, depression, headaches and sugar cravings.

Candida overgrowth usually happens when your body is too acidic from excessive consumption of processed foods or sugar, or if there are insufficient healthy bacteria in your system. Because apple cider vinegar is fermented with a beneficial yeast, it can serve as a prebiotic for healthy bacteria, essentially helping good bacteria grow.

4. Himalayan Salt

Salt is essential for life, and your body needs it for optimal function. But it's important to realize that there are major differences between the refined and highly processed salt found in processed foods and regular table salt, and unrefined natural salt such as Himalayan salt. The latter is important to many biological processes, including:

Being a major component of your blood plasma, lymphatic fluid, extracellular fluid and even amniotic fluid

Carrying nutrients into and out of your cells, and helping maintain your acid base balance

Increasing the glial cells in your brain, which are responsible for creative thinking and long-term planning. Both sodium and chloride are also necessary for the firing of neurons

Maintain and help regulate blood pressure

Helping your brain communicate with your muscles, so that you can move on demand via sodium-potassium ion exchange

Supporting the function of your adrenal glands, which produce dozens of vital hormones

While natural sea salt used to be a healthy source of salt, I shy away from it these days, as recent tests¹⁴ reveal 90% of sea salt is contaminated with microplastics. Himalayan salt is not plagued by this contamination.

On hot days, or after exercising and sweating profusely, you can make a wholesome sports drink to replenish lost electrolytes and minerals by mixing a pinch of Himalayan salt and a dash of fresh lemon juice in a glass of water. Apart from culinary purposes, Himalayan salt can also be substituted for bath salts, which will allow your skin to absorb valuable minerals from the water.

5. Black Pepper

Black pepper is another key staple few households would want to do without, and, like most spices, it has medicinal qualities that gives it value far beyond mere flavor. For example, Europeans have used black pepper for thousands of years in traditional medicine to treat inflammation and digestive problems.

Its effectiveness is due in part to a compound known as piperine. Research¹⁵ suggest piperine's ability to inhibit new fat cells from forming, known as adipogenesis, helps reduce waist size and body fat, and optimizes cholesterol levels.

Perhaps more importantly, research has shown growth of several types of pathogens are inhibited by black pepper, including Staph,¹⁶ E. coli,¹⁷ Helicobacter pylori (bacteria known to cause ulcers),¹⁸ and parasites.¹⁹ So, black pepper not only may have anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antibacterial and fever-reducing actions, but immune system-enhancing properties as well.

I recommend using a hand-held mill for grinding fresh peppercorn, as whole peppercorns have an almost indefinite shelf life. Ground pepper only retains optimum freshness for about three months, and is sometimes "adulterated" with something other than black pepper. When cooking, use it at the last moment to retain the full flavor of the essential oils.

Frontier organic black pepper is a tasty choice. Another, which is my personal preference, is Indian long pepper which, as so eloquently described by Serious Eats has a flavor that is:²⁰

"[M]uch more complex than black pepper, reminiscent of spice blends like garam masala more than a single spice. It possesses black pepper's heat and musk, but in a less harsh, more nuanced way, tempered by sweet notes of nutmeg, cinnamon and cardamom. Its finish lingers on the tongue with a tobacco-like coolness; where black pepper stings, long pepper balms."

6. Medicinal Spices

While virtually all spices have medicinal qualities of some kind, the following stand out among the crowd:

- **Turmeric** — The reasons to make turmeric part of your life (if it isn't already) are almost too numerous to count, especially when you consider its incredible restorative, disease-healing and preventive capabilities.

Turmeric has been on the proverbial "top 10 superfoods" list in Chinese medicine for millennia²¹ and just as long in the Indian Ayurvedic healing tradition.

One component in turmeric, curcumin, has been proven so effective as an anti-inflammatory that it's compared to prescription medications, without the toxic side effects²² such as ulcer formation, internal bleeding and a lowered white blood cell count. Its ability to cross the blood-brain barrier also makes it a valuable agent against dementia Alzheimer's.^{23,24}

Antioxidants in turmeric also neutralize free radicals throughout your body, including your brain, kidney, liver, heart and gastrointestinal tract. In addition, curcumin has been shown to induce expression of phase II antioxidant enzymes, thereby aiding glutathione synthesis, which is important for detoxification.

- **Ginger** — Ginger has been used for millennia in areas of India and China for much more than adding a sweet/spicy flavor to foods and drinks. It's proved over time to be a popular remedy to soothe away headaches, nausea — particularly motion sickness — and to treat several problems related to digestive health as well as pain and inflammation from arthritic conditions, to mention but a few.

More recently, research²⁵ shows ginger is a viable antidote and protective agent against fatal poisoning from such agents as pesticides, environmental pollutants, heavy metals, bacterial and fungal toxins and even some cosmetic products and medications.

- **Cumin** – Cumin is the second most popular spice in the world, second only to black pepper, and is considered by many "the secret sauce" in most savory dishes. Cumin seeds have been prized for thousands of years and are best known in their ground form as a spice added to curry dishes.

Research²⁶ reveals cumin helps stimulate secretion of pancreatic enzymes, which are necessary for proper digestion and nutrient assimilation. Cumin also has anticancer and antidiabetes properties, attributed to its active components, including terpens, phenols and flavonoids.²⁷

In fact, cumin has been found to work better than the antidiabetes drug glibenclamide in treating diabetic rats²⁸ and similar benefits were found in a human study.²⁹

- **Mustard seed** – Mustard seed which, like broccoli, belongs to the brassica genus,³⁰ contains compounds that inhibit cancer proliferation and metastasis.³¹ It also contains myrosinase – a compound that augments the cancer-fighting potential of other cruciferous veggies, delivering a double-punch when combined.

The enzyme myrosinase is critical for the conversion of glucosinolates into chemoprotective compounds known as isothiocyanates. While all cruciferous veggies contain some myrosinase, you significantly boost conversion by eating them together with a particularly myrosinase-rich food such as mustard seed powder.

Mustard seed powder can also be used to whip up homemade topical remedies, such as plasters and baths to relieve pain. Part of the pain-relieving effect is due to the mustard seed's high magnesium and selenium content. In Ayurvedic medicine, it was used topically to improve blood circulation and detoxification. Taken

internally, 1 teaspoon of mustard seed powder twice a day can be used as a remedy for constipation.

7. Essential Kitchen Tools

Lastly, the type of kitchen utensils you use during preparation and cooking can also have an effect on your health, for better or worse. To protect and support the health of your entire family, consider the following tips:

- **Use ceramic knives for fast-browning produce** – Ceramic knives are chemically inert, and said to slow the browning process.³² Ceramic blades are best for slicing fruit, vegetables and boneless meat, but not frozen foods, meat with bones or cheese (because of its tendency to stick). Also avoid using a ceramic blade to crush foods like garlic.
- **Switch to ceramic or other inert, nontoxic cookware** – The slippery surfaces of nonstick pots and pans comes courtesy of poly- and perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has found to be likely carcinogens.

When heated, nonstick cookware and bakeware release a related chemical, perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), linked to thyroid disease, infertility, organ damage, and developmental and reproductive problems in lab animals.

Hazardous toxins are produced after only two to five minutes of heating the pan. At 464 degrees Fahrenheit, the coating on nonstick cookware begins to break down and release toxins into the air. Stainless steel, aluminum and cast iron pans also have their drawbacks, as the metals may not be entirely inert, resulting in potentially toxic metal exposure.

Ceramic cookware circumvents all of these problems. A true ceramic pan or dish will be made only with water and inorganic materials and minerals from the earth's crust. Because it doesn't contain any metals, a ceramic pan is nonreactive and

nontoxic. No odors or gases release into the air even when heated to extremely high temperatures.

- **Use glass containers for food storage** – If you're still using plastic containers, bags and plastic wrap for food storage, consider switching to glass containers.

Depending on what product you're using, your plastic might contain phthalates, bisphenol-A, bisphenol-S – endocrine-disrupting "gender-bending" chemicals that are causing males of many species to become more female – PVC and styrene, two carcinogens and more.

Virtually all plastic chemicals carry some risk to health and are best avoided as much as possible, especially if you have children. Glass is completely inert and reusable indefinitely, provided it doesn't break, in which case it's recyclable.

- **Use separate cutting boards for meat and veggies** – Kitchens are notorious breeding grounds for disease-causing bacteria, courtesy of contaminated meat products, including antibiotic-resistant strains of E. coli.

To avoid cross-contamination between foods, use a designated cutting board, preferably wood, not plastic, for raw meat and poultry, and never use this board for other food preparation, such as cutting up vegetables. Color coding your cutting boards is a simple way to distinguish between them.

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