

July 2026

**Published by the Niagara County Office for the Aging
111 Main Street Lockport NY 14094 716-438-4020**



Understanding Seed Oils

You may have noticed a recent increase in people talking about "seed oils" online, on television or in passing conversations. You may have even heard them referred to as the "Hateful 8". So what exactly are seed oils?

Seed oils are extracted from the seeds of certain plants. Research suggests that a diet including seed oils is healthful, though they have been blamed for such conditions like eczema, weight gain, and inflammation by social media pundits. Are they actually bad?

The most attention given to seed oils often are discussing eight specific oils; canola, soybean, safflower, corn, cottonseed, grapeseed, rice bran and peanut oils. Other seed oils can include sesame, flaxseed and walnut oils.

Omega-3 and Omega-6 Fatty Acids

Seed oils contain a mixture of saturated, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Polyunsaturated fats, or PUFAs, are often present in the highest amounts. PUFAs include omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, which help decrease inflammation when eaten in the appropriate ratio. Seed oils have a much higher amount of omega-6 fatty acids compared to omega-3 fatty acids

Sometimes omega-6 fatty acids are labeled as "bad", while omega-3 fatty acids have a great reputation as a healthy fat, but it is not that black and white. Omega-3's (found in fatty fish, walnuts, chia and flax seeds) can support brain health and heart health. But omega-6 fatty acids are an essential fatty acid, meaning our bodies cannot make them on our own and we need to get them from food sources. Omega-6's can help lower bad cholesterol and help protect good cholesterol.

How Are Seed Oils Made?

Seed oils have been criticized for how they are produced. Some oils are expeller-pressed or cold pressed, meaning that heat or chemicals are not used during the process of oil extraction. These oils are produced in small batches and have a cloudy appearance, and they can go rancid quickly. In order to yield a clear, shelf-stable oil, producers use heat in extracting the oil from the seed.

Chemical solvents may be used to make the extraction process more efficient with less waste. Concerns exist about the potential for chemicals to remain in some oils after processing. However, the FDA's Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) database notes there is no evidence to reasonably suspect a hazard to the public from the way they are used.

Should Seed Oils Be Avoided?

It is important to consider a variety of factors when choosing what to eat. Top sources of seed oils for many Americans come from ultra-processed foods, such as baked/fried chips, frozen meals, convenience items and other fried items which lack

nutrition. Also consider many of these items are often high in sodium, fat and/or sugar. While ultra-processed foods are likely to be considered unhealthy, it is the contents of the meal/snack as a whole that make these foods harmful to your health, not specifically the seed oils.

How to Use Seed Oils

Grapeseed, canola and soybean oils have a high smoke point, which means they do not degrade during cooking. In addition, they are good substitutes for solid fats like butter, lard or shortening, which contain more saturated fats. Below are many healthy ways to use seed oils:

- Substitute for some of the solid fat in baked goods, such as whole-grain muffins
- Season a cast iron skillet
- Roast vegetables in the oven
- Stir-fry meat and vegetables
- Pop popcorn on the stove
- Make salad dressings — the fat in oils increases the absorption of the fat-soluble vitamins A, E and K that are in leafy greens.



<https://www.eatright.org/health/essential-nutrients/fats/understanding-seed-oils>