Oils and fats for family cooking

My first choice: gentle cooking

For everyday cooking, I choose **extra virgin olive oil** and low to medium heat. I save higher heat for recipes that need it.

When I need more heat

My order of preference for brief cooking:

1. **Refined avocado oil**
   My first choice for higher heat. Look for **"refined"** on the label.

2. **Ghee (clarified butter)**
   An option for some recipes. Removing water and almost all the milk solids makes it more heat-tolerant than butter.

3. **Extra virgin olive oil**
   It is suitable for cooking, too. At home, I mainly use it over **low to medium heat** and avoid overheating it.

This is a practical preference, not a universal ranking of stability or health benefits.



Want coconut flavor?

Choose **virgin coconut oil** for a curry or a sweet dish, using gentle heat. Refining removes much of that flavor.

Without heating: extra virgin olive oil. Alternate with canola, walnut or flaxseed oil for plant-based omega-3s.

Ghee and coconut oil, for some recipes: both are high in saturated fat. Coconut oil can raise LDL cholesterol compared with oils such as olive oil. Avoid ghee if you have a milk allergy: traces of milk proteins may remain.

For the family: from age 2, WHO recommends mainly unsaturated fats, with saturated fats providing no more than 10% of daily energy.

In the oven and the pan: controlling the heat

Oven at 250 °C: is the oil that hot?

The oven setting refers to the air temperature. **It does not mean that all the food and its oil reach that temperature.**

Water in food limits its temperature while it stays moist. A thin layer of oil on a dry baking sheet can become much hotter.

Example: a pizza may need an oven at 250 °C (482 °F). I prefer to add olive oil afterward to preserve its aroma. Avoid preheating a baking sheet with oil alone.

Do not leave fat heating on its own

Have the food ready before you start. Add oil or ghee to the pan **just before adding the food**. Do not leave it heating while you chop or prepare the rest.

For deep-frying, preheating is necessary: **use a thermometer, stay nearby and heat only to the target temperature**.

If it starts smoking, remove it from the heat. Do not wait for smoke before cooking, and do not reuse burned fat.

Use controlled heat, without rushing

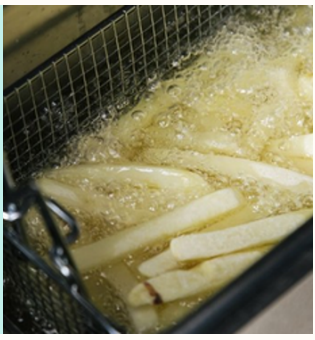
Favor low to medium heat and give food the time it needs, rather than turning the burner to maximum to hurry it along. **Do not cook longer than necessary:** more time does not always preserve more nutrients.

No fat has an “oxidation-free” temperature.
Deterioration also depends on time and exposure to air. The smoke point is not the point where oxidation begins.

French fries: temperature and color

170 °C

Oil temperature
Keep it at 160–175 °C (320–347 °F).



Before frying

Wash the cut potatoes, then dry them thoroughly before placing them in the oil.

While frying

Measure the temperature with a deep-fry thermometer. Do not exceed **175 °C (347 °F)**.

When to take them out

Aim for a **light golden color**. Avoid dark browning or burning. Do not fry longer than needed.

Overbrowning potatoes produces more **acrylamide**, a substance we should limit exposure to. Temperature and color still matter when using avocado oil or ghee.

For everyday meals: choose boiled or steamed potatoes and keep deep-frying occasional. Avoid repeatedly reheating the same oil.

Coming soon

Raw foods and cooking
An upcoming HealMe guide to what works well raw, what needs cooking and how to make the most of nutrients.

SOURCES · tap to read

IFM · choosing cooking fats
UC Davis · olive and avocado oils / AOCS · oxidation
AESAN · French fries / European Union · temperatures
WHO · fats / Harvard · coconut oil / NHS · milk allergy
Study · temperatures during baking

Photos: Pexels, reused from the previous edition. November 2026.