

Oz-ing praise for tocotrienol

Famed American celebrity doctor Dr Mehmet Oz and US alternative health expert Bryce Wylde believe in the health benefits of red palm oil.

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In a recent American television broadcast that left many gaping with amazement, famed American celebrity doctor Mehmet Oz, better known as Dr Oz, actually sang the praises of palm oil.

Specifically, the doctor was extolling the virtues of red palm oil (RPO), which in industry parlance would be the crude oil extracted from carefully selected fresh fruit bunches of the oil palm tree (*Elaeis guineensis*).

The beautiful red colour, akin to the colour of a ready-to-drink Ribena (a blackcurrant drink), comes from the high content of beta-carotenes (precursor to Vitamin A) found in the oil palm fruitlets. The manufacturing of RPO via a gentle refining process preserves the maximum amount of natural vitamin content in the oil.

Calling it one of the 13 "miracles for 2013", Dr Oz pointedly said that in this case, the colour red might as well be the "stop sign for ageing, both inside and out".

In his recent television show, Dr Oz, together with alternative health expert Bryce Wylde, both expounded on the properties of RPO to rapturous applause from the live audience.

"Did you know that palm trees contain an ancient remedy that can slow down the ageing process, fight belly fat and combat heart disease?" asked the oft-controversial Dr Oz as he tried to position RPO as one of the most significant nutritional findings of 2013.

Other than carotenes, the health benefits of red palm oil are now also attributed to another phytonutrient called tocotrienols, which are now touted by some as the "Super Vitamin E". Tocotrienols are the primary form of vitamin E in the mesocarp (flesh) of the palm fruit, and initial research findings are suggesting that tocotrienols possess powerful neuroprotective, antioxidant, anti-cancer as well as cholesterol-lowering properties.

Tocotrienols occur at very low levels in nature, and are natural compounds found in rice bran, coconut oil, cocoa butter, barley, wheat germ, annatto, and palm oil. However, crude palm oil contains the highest amount of tocotrienols in nature, mainly consisting of gamma-tocotrienol and alpha-tocotrienol (the other two forms are beta and delta tocotrienols).

The TV host went on to explain how the tocotrienols provide protection against age-related brain and heart diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia; arterial blockage and unhealthy levels of LDL-cholesterol.

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In a recent episode of *The Dr Oz Show*, American celebrity doctor Mehmet Oz expounded on the health properties of red palm oil.

women who consumed red palm oil enriched with tocotrienols resulted in the loss of belly fat as red palm oil is metabolised immediately and not stored in the abdomen," said Dr Oz, who added that the unique mix of tocotrienols and carotenes puts RPO above other oils in terms of

nutritional and health benefits.

Not many people paid heed to tocotrienols 30 years ago, but of late, the scientific community just can't seem to get enough of it.

Just in the last five years alone, dozens of papers have been published on this lesser known form of vitamin E, which can actually exist in four forms, or isomers. The most well studied isomers would come under the tocopherol group, with its alpha, beta, delta and gamma isomers.

Initial research on tocotrienols, which also comes in the alpha, beta, delta and gamma isomers, looked at its value in moderating cholesterol levels.

In the 1990s, scientists started to look at how tocotrienols could be used against cancer.

Wylde also took the opportunity to clear the confusion among some people that equated palm oil with palm kernel oil (PKO). "Palm fruit oil contains mainly palmitic and oleic acids and is around 50% saturated, while PKO contains mainly lauric acid and is more than 89% saturated.

"Uncritical observance by some has led to the general assumption that PKO and palm fruit oil are the same (kind of saturated fat), and this may have led to one of the greatest oversights in modern nutrition," he said in response to Dr Oz's question on why he is only hearing about the benefits of RPO only very recently.

"The stigma attached to the kernel has kept the fruit in the dark – at least until now. Virgin organic sustainable red palm fruit oil is otherwise a bona fide miracle food," Wylde declared on Dr Oz' website at doctoroz.com.

On the recent fascination with coconut oil, Wylde added that even when the marginally higher levels of medium chain triglyceride levels

that coconut oil has over palm is accounted for, RPO's carotenoid and tocotrienol antioxidants will "give the latter a significant health advantage over coconut oil".

The high antioxidant content of RPO suggests that it could be a potent "anti-cancer food", with some suggesting that tocotrienols may help fight skin, stomach, pancreas, liver, lung, colon, prostate, breast, and other cancers.

For Dr Oz, the cardioprotective properties of tocotrienols are also important. "Palm oil is used in many countries in the world. Science now understands that inflammation in the artery lining is what warrants cholesterol to deposit in the first place. So, it makes sense that the protective effects come from the high antioxidant, anti-inflammatory content of the red palm oil, which works to quench free radicals and keep inflammation under control."

High in mono-unsaturated fatty acids, RPO has a mild, neutral taste and is a healthy choice for cooking, frying, baking and in dressings and marinades. However, Wylde is more specific in his recommendation in that he is asking the audience to look for "virgin organic RPO". Virgin oil is the result of a single, simple pressing of the fruit or nut, while the organic status of a product has to come from accredited agencies, like the United States Department of Agriculture, for example.

"The health benefits of olive oil have been touted for many hundreds of years. More recently, coconut oil has become all the rage and hailed by many as the king of oils. But, whatever oil you choose – whether it's olive, coconut, almond, canola, peanut, safflower, walnut, or even avocado oil – none compare to the powerful nutritional virtues of virgin organic red palm fruit oil," said Wylde, who recommended his

audience to supplement their diet by incorporating one to two table-spoons of RPO into their daily diet.

In Malaysia, planters had for decades carefully cultivated some special palm hybrids for the production of RPO. While the uptake of RPO in the Malaysian market is low compared to the "normal" (the oft-used golden colour cooking oil found in many homes), it is heartening to note that palm oil as a whole is the world's most consumed vegetable oil, and is used in edible oil as well as in processed foods like chocolate bars, ice cream, instant noodles, and margarine.

To his credit, Wylde also reminded the people to buy sustainably produced palm oil that comes from Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil-certified sources. "Besides its known nutritional virtues, private enterprise has recognised palm oil's other lucrative applications.

"The controversy is focused primarily on three issues: Extinction of orangutans, deforestation, and, particularly, the food versus fuel dispute. Besides demolishing the habitat of one of the most wonderful creatures on earth, it is thought that the conversion of the crops currently used for food over to fuel would significantly decrease accessibility to those looking to use the oil for dietary purposes, increasing the number of undernourished people in the world.

"Where some researchers believe that the palm oil industry has the capacity to fulfill both demands, responsible people don't want to create negative environmental impact. So, on top of 'virgin' and 'organic' RPO, we need to look for brands that produce the oil sustainably."

Reference: www.doctoroz.com/videos/miracle-fat-red-palm-fruit-oil-pt-1