

Unrefined Palm Oil Boosts Lung Immunity Against Covid-19



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Jakarta. A study shows that unprocessed red palm oil helps to maintain lung immunity and respiratory health, strengthening's one's body defenses against the coronavirus that is causing the Covid-19 disease.

The product, also known as virgin red palm oil, can help maintain an adequate amount of a substance crucial for the body's immune system.

Sri Raharjo, researcher of food technology and agricultural products at Gajah Mada University, said that alveoli, tiny sacs in human lungs where oxygen and carbon dioxide exchanges, are covered with emulsifiers or surfactant which contains palmitic acid (palmitate).

"Palmitate covers 60 percent of alveoli inner walls. It is synthesized directly from fat, and the virgin red palm oil has the palmitate needed by the alveoli surfactant," Sri Raharjo said in a virtual seminar on Thursday.

The body does produce surfactant naturally, but consuming palmitic acid should help keep it at an adequate level needed for the body.

When the coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, enters the body, it will go through the alveolus, self multiplies and disrupts the surfactant synthesis process. Macrophage, a type of

cell in the alveolus, will counter-attack by releasing cytokines, causing blood vessels to widen, then leaking water into the alveoli.

"If alveoli are drowned in water, the surfactant will no longer be effective and cannot synthesize. The gas exchange will not run smoothly, and the person will have breathing difficulty. In this state, the person requires ventilators to breathe," Sri Raharjo said.

Virgin red palm oil also contains pro-vitamin A, vitamin E, vitamin C, and beta carotene, nutrients that are essential to guard the body against Covid-19.

Sri Raharjo said that virgin red palm oil also has 15 times higher pro-vitamin A than carrots and high tocotrienols, which boosts the immunity system.

"Vitamin E, tocotrienol, and pro-vitamin A dissolved in virgin red palm oil are powerful antioxidants that can ward off free radicals. Vitamin C, which is available in many fruits, functions to refresh vitamin E as a weakened antioxidant after reacting with free radicals," he said.

However, it is essential to pay attention to the saturated and unsaturated fat intake. If the diet is not optimal, the body will try to compensate to cover the nutrients needed, in which there will be inflammation in alveoli.

Sri Raharjo said the clearer the oil, the fewer nutrients left in the oil. Therefore, unprocessed oil is the best way to consume red palm oil.

"It is best to use virgin red palm oil as cooking oil or for stir fry, instead of frying oil. The oil can be mixed when the meal is finished cooking, so the beta carotene and vitamin E are not damaged," he said.

Despite the benefits, red virgin palm oil remains under negative perception surrounding its refined form, the palm oil. The World Health Organization said that palm oil is unhealthy and causes heart attacks because of its high saturated fat.

The global agency body suggested avoiding saturated fat consumption such as fatty meat, butter, palm and coconut oils, cream, cheese, ghee, and lard to protect the body against Covid-19.

"In Africa, virgin red palm oil is the basic ingredient of daily food for its people, but in Indonesia, there are still many people who do not understand it. They even don't know if the food they eat daily contains palm oil," Darmono Taniwiryono, chairman of the Indonesian Palm Oil Society (Maksi) said on Thursday.