Protects Your Cardiovascular System
Most people probably know grape seed extract because of its benefits for the heart. There’s good reason for this. Grape seed extract reduces high blood pressure, protects the blood vessel walls from damaging free radical activity, and prevents the dangerous oxidation of LDL cholesterol—one of the first steps on the road to a heart attack or stroke.

In the years since, grape seed extract has become a preferred botanical for a variety of health concerns, from lowering blood pressure to preventing tumors. But not all grape seed extracts are effective! I believe that adding a valid, French OPC grape seed extract to your regimen is one of the best things you can do for your health, and we’ll take a look at its amazing abilities in this Terry Talks Nutrition®.

In an Italian clinical study, individuals with pre- or mild hypertension were divided into three groups, two with grape seed extract, at lower and higher dosages, and one with a diet and exercise intervention only, serving as a control group. At the end of the four-month trial, both grape seed extract groups saw an improvement in blood pressure, although those at the higher dosage—300 mg daily—noticed more dramatic effects. In fact, blood pressure numbers normalized in 93 percent of those in the higher dosage group.

Research published in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences examined the vasodilating—blood vessel relaxing—properties of grape seed fractions.

By allowing blood vessels to open rather than restrict, blood travels with less force, reducing pressure.

This study showed that grape seed proanthocyanidins promoted nitric oxide (NO) release and an increase in cyclic GMP levels. Nitric oxide is a molecule that is only active for a few seconds at a time in the bloodstream. Even though it is considered a free-radical, it actually has beneficial effects for blood pressure, helping signal the opening of blood vessels and arteries. Cyclic GMP (cGMP) also relaxes smooth muscles, including blood vessels.

Another clinical study, published in the Journal of Medicinal Food compared the results of individuals with mildly high cholesterol taking a grape seed extract versus a placebo for 8 weeks. Lipid profiles and oxidized LDL (bad) cholesterol were improved in those taking grape seed extract. The researchers concluded that grape seed extract decreased the risk of blood clotting (without adverse effects on blood thinning) and other cardiovascular disorders.

Other scientific studies have found similar results: grape seed extract helps prevent blood clots from forming, lowers blood pressure, and shields blood vessels and arteries from free radical damage. There may be no more powerful natural medicine to protect against heart disease than French grape seed extract.

Stops Diabetes and Obesity
While I believe that the single most important thing you can do to manage your weight and prevent diabetes is to follow a healthy eating plan, there is no denying that French grape seed extract can be a key part in getting healthy and recovering from sugar addiction. For example, a clinical study in Thailand found that grape seed extract reduced blood sugar levels after a high-carbohydrate meal. The OPCs in grape seed can help stop the sugar spikes that affect insulin levels and possibly lead to diabetes.

If you have read my past articles, you know that I believe the most powerful natural medicine available for any and all diseases is curcumin. Not far behind curcumin is grape seed extract. This amazing ingredient prevents heart disease, kills cancer cells, speeds the healing of damaged muscle tissue, reduces inflammation and can even stop diabetes and prevent weight gain.

Of course, there are a lot of grape seed extracts available, so choosing the best one can be tricky.

That’s why I recommend a tannin-free French OPC grape seed extract that is standardized to contain only OPCs that are small enough to guarantee absorption.

A French OPC grape seed extract may:
- Lower blood pressure
- Stop deep vein thrombosis
- Prevent diabetes and obesity
- Speed muscle recovery
- Inhibit tumor growth
- Protect the brain
- Stop inflammation
- Prevent oxidative damage

Terry recommends taking 150-1,200 mg of tannin-free French grape seed extract daily.
Another study in 2009 found that grape seed extract reduced the buildup of abdominal fat and reduced blood sugar. This was due, in part, to an increase of adiponectin, a protein responsible for regulating blood sugar levels, insulin metabolism, cholesterol levels, and inhibiting NF-kB activation and other inflammatory markers. Compared to the control group, the adiponectin level of the grape seed group increased 61 percent! Other scientific studies have found similar results—that grape seed extract activates cyclic AMP, protects against fat accumulation, and improves blood triglyceride and plasma lipid levels.

**Speeds Recovery from Exercise and Injury**

The anti-inflammatory power of grape seed extract has brought it to the attention of researchers studying its effects on muscle recovery. In these investigations, grape seed OPCs have boosted anti-inflammatory cytokines (IL-10), and helped regenerate damaged muscle fibers. Macrophages, known for their ability to stop bacteria and viruses, also help heal injured tissue. One study found that elevated levels of macrophages and neutrophils (white blood cells found at the scenes of inflammation) were completely resolved in just 5 days when using grape seed extract.

**Prevents Cancer and Tumor Growth**

Grape seed OPCs are on the front line of cancer research. Some of the most exciting studies have been done at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. Their research of grape seed extracts has shown that this powerful botanical ingredient has the ability to target specific colon cancer cells.

Another study examined the effect of grape seed extract on breast cancer cells when used alone or with a conventional treatment. Their results showed that the two interventions worked well together, but that grape seed extract alone was a strong inhibitor of breast cancer cells. These results have been mirrored in other research showing that grape seed extract polyphenols have a strong ability to stop tumor growth.

One of the reasons for this is that grape seed extract inhibits aromatase, an enzyme that converts androgen into estrogen. Breast and prostate cancer tissues typically have higher levels of aromatase activity and reduced growth in MCF-7 breast cancer cells. They concluded, “We believe that these results are exciting in that they show grape seed extract to be potentially useful in the prevention/treatment of hormone-dependent breast cancer through the inhibition of aromatase activity as well as its expression.”

Aside from helping inhibit tumor cells, grape seed has other applications for cancer treatment. An Australian scientific study found that grape seed extract reduced the severity of mucosities, a painful inflammation of the mucous membranes of the digestive tract, including the mouth and small intestines due to chemotherapy. The researchers also found that grape seed extract killed colon cancer cells outright. Other grape seed studies have shown that it stops prostate cancer cells through direct stimulation of tumor suppressing cells, and bladder cancer by increasing oxidative stresses only to the cancer cells, halting their growth, while leaving healthy cells alone.

An additional way grape seed extract stops cancer is by preventing cancer cells from connecting to blood vessels, and depriving them of oxygen and nutrients.

If you spend a lot of time outdoors and skin cancer is a concern, grape seed extract may offer protection here as well: a Romanian study reported that keratinocytes (the major type of cells in the outer layer of the skin) treated with grape seed extract 30 minutes before UVB radiation protected them from damage.

Overall, I believe the antioxidant power of grape seed is excellent for preventing cancer and it is a natural partner for my favorite natural cancer treatment—curcumin.

**Slows Alzheimer’s Progression and Promotes Cognitive Health and Focus**

Because of their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activity, grape seed OPCs are increasingly on the cutting edge of Alzheimer’s research. Studies have shown that they protect the delicate circuitry of the brain. For example, an Indian study found that grape seed proanthocyanidins reduce the effects of oxidative stress in the aging brain and consider it a neuroprotectant to prevent cognitive loss. The nutrient’s ability was due, in part, to its blood glucose lowering as much as its free-radical fighting power. Considering the growing body of research that points to a connection between blood sugar levels and risk of...
Alzheimer’s, this is an important discovery. Other work has examined more direct effects of grape seed extract on Alzheimer’s disease (AD).

The cause of AD is not entirely known. However, certain characteristic changes in the brain are associated with this condition—accumulated clusters of a protein called beta-amyloid, (sometimes called “amyloid beta”) and clumps of dead and dying nerve and brain cells. These clusters and clumps, called plaques and tangles, are believed to interfere with the proper transmission of messages between brain cells and the death of the cells themselves. As with most diseases, inflammation is also believed to be involved, causing the accumulation of plaques and tangles to have even more damaging effects.

Studies conducted by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine showed that grape seed extract inhibited the formation of plaques and tangles, and aside from preventing the buildup or clustering of beta-amyloid, grape seed extract supported greater brain plasticity—the ability of the brain to adapt and create new neural pathways.

While further studies are needed, I think it’s very likely that we’ll see more applications of grape seed extract to bolster cognition and delay Alzheimer’s symptoms in the future.

Other OPC research has investigated the application of this natural ingredient to attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children. A placebo-controlled, double blind study published in the journal *European Child & Adolescent Psychology* found that after just one month, OPCs boosted attention span, caused a significant reduction of hyperactivity, and improved motor coordination. The researchers noted that the symptoms returned one month after stopping the treatment, so OPCs would need to be part of an ongoing regimen.

**Stops Inflammation and Oxidative Damage**

Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity (ORAC) values are typically presented as a way of determining how much free radical fighting power a given fruit or vegetable has. While there’s no way of duplicating the complex structure and synergy of a food, there are improved ways of taking some of the best components of fruits and vegetables and concentrating them to the point where you see extremely high ORAC values. I believe that the best grape seed OPC supplement is one that can show high ORAC value. French OPC grape seed extract has an ORAC value of 20,000 per gram—compare this to the blueberry, which has an ORAC value of only 600 per gram!

Grape seed extract OPCs fight inflammation and the effects of free radicals throughout the body. While we often associate antioxidant power with anti-aging, it also balances immune response to reduce everything from damaging chronic joint inflammation in rheumatoid arthritis (RA) to allergic responses.

A Saudi Arabian study found that grape seed OPCs were able to regulate the activity of certain immune-regulating T-cells, inducing some and reducing others, in a way that stopped inflammatory markers. The researchers concluded that grape seed extract proanthocyanidins could become an adjunct therapy for RA, or possibly an alternative treatment in its own right.

Because autoimmune inflammation also interferes with the process of bone formation and resorption, individuals with RA often contend with structural joint damage. However, researchers in Korea discovered that the ability of grape seed OPCs to reduce inflammation also stopped the symptoms of collagen-induced arthritis in a laboratory study. It actually helped get the natural process of building bone back on track.

Aside from combating RA symptoms and bone damage, grape seed extract prevents the inflammation that causes allergy-induced asthma symptoms. A Korean study found that grape seed extract reduced the allergic hyper-responsiveness that restricts bronchial airways, and the inflammatory markers in lung tissue. The researchers felt that grape seed extract could be a valuable therapeutic ingredient for acute and chronic asthma. Considering French OPC grape seed extract is free of side effects and risks, this could be excellent news for those who are looking for alternatives to asthma treatment. I wouldn’t encourage anyone to simply throw away their inhaler, but I certainly would suggest adding a French OPC grape seed extract to your regimen.

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**Antioxidant ORAC Value Per 100 grams***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>ORAC Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dark Chocolate Powder</td>
<td>40,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueberries</td>
<td>6,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French OPC Grape Seed Extract</td>
<td>2,000,000 per 100 grams**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strawberries</td>
<td>3,577</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity **Based on an independent lab analysis

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*[Figure 1]*
Other Powerful Benefits of Grape Seed Extract

Of course, with all of these attributes, I think I’ve just touched the surface of all of the amazing benefits of French OPC grape seed. For instance, in a double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical study published in the journal Menopause, grape seed improved a multitude of health factors for women in menopause. The study was divided into a low- and high-dose grape seed group and one placebo group. Both grape seed groups saw a reduction in anxiety, blood pressure levels, and an increase in lean muscle mass. Specific menopause symptoms, including hot flashes and insomnia, improved in the high-dose group.

In other work, researchers in Austria have found that OPCs from grape seed are effective antibacterial agents against ten different pathogens. A study reported in the Journal of Toxicological Sciences measured the abilities of grape seed extract against methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), a staph bacteria that is difficult to treat because it has developed to become resistant to antibiotics. The researchers found that grape seed extract was effective against 43 strains of the bacteria, and could, in the words of those conducting the study, “signify a major advancement in the treatment of MRSA diseases.”

The antioxidant power of grape seed extract may one day help those undergoing radiation treatments. Because the liver reacts so poorly to radiation treatment, (whether or not the liver or another part of the body is a target of the therapy), it suffers damage that becomes a serious secondary concern. Turkish scientific research showed that grape seed extract protected liver cellular membranes from oxidative damage, and from protein and lipid oxidation. Their work showed that grape seed actually restored levels of antioxidant parameters after radiation treatment. While this is cutting-edge work, and more studies need to be done, it’s exciting to think that grape seed extract could have this kind of powerful result.

Not All Grape Seed Extracts Work!

While there have been astounding results from grape seed studies, you must be careful in selecting a product. There are many grape seed extracts available. OPCs must be small enough to be absorbed and effective. Many extracts contain tannins, which are too large to be effectively absorbed and don’t contribute to your health the same way that OPCs do. However, these tannins are counted as OPCs and enhance the label claim, even though they cannot be absorbed! Tannin-free is best.

That’s why I recommend taking French OPC grape seed extract that is standardized to contain only OPCs that are small enough to be absorbed, so you’ll get the maximum benefits. I urge you to add a French OPC grape seed extract to your regimen.

Small OPCs are Absorbed Best

When in doubt, always consult your physician or healthcare practitioner. This column is to provide you with information to maintain your health.