Olives Love Your Heart & Brain

Research on olive oil has repeatedly shown that it lowers your risk of cardiovascular diseases, including reducing your risk of stroke, high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, and oxidized LDL cholesterol. In fact, one large study of over 7,000 men and women found that a high intake of olive oil reduced the risk of cardiovascular disease by at least 35 percent and dying from heart disease by up to 48 percent!
Stop Heart Disease – and More – with Olive Polyphenols

The underlying causes of every chronic disease – including heart disease - are inflammation and oxidation. So, apart from the structural benefits that olive oil imparts on the heart and arteries – the fats help build strong cells and flexible blood vessels – there is something else going on. Polyphenols are the answer. Polyphenols are a group of compounds found in plants – especially fruits – that have both powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory abilities.

Interestingly, a Spanish review focused exclusively on the polyphenols in the Mediterranean diet, including those in olives and olive oil. They found that the total intake of polyphenols on a daily basis reduced the risk of diabetes in elderly people who were also at high risk of cardiovascular disease. Diabetes and heart disease are rooted in inflammation and often show up in tandem.

Polyphenols in olive oil have been specifically called out in other studies as well. In fact, though they were once considered “minor” compounds (because so much emphasis was placed on the fats in olive oil), they have shown some remarkable abilities to keep us healthy. Polyphenols from olives have been found to be responsible for stopping cholesterol oxidation, reducing inflammation, improving cholesterol profiles, strengthening blood vessels, inhibiting oxidative damage, and preventing blood clots.

Olive leaves bring their own benefits to the table, too. You may have heard of oleuropein – another polyphenol and a key compound from olive leaves – that has been shown to reduce blood pressure. In fact, in a clinical trial, olive leaf extract lowered systolic pressure by 11 points and diastolic pressure by 5 points. The participants experienced additional benefits – their LDL cholesterol levels went down as well. Similar results have been reported in other scientific studies.

Researchers believe olive leaf extract reduces blood pressure through a combination of its antioxidant activity (much more powerful than vitamin E) which protects the walls of the blood vessels, and because it is a vasodilator – that is, it helps widen narrow blood vessels so that blood flows more easily and with less effort by the heart.

Beyond The Heart: Olive Compounds Stop Disease

While olive oil’s role in heart disease prevention is well-established, it may come as a surprise to learn about the many other ways that olive polyphenols keep you healthy.

An Italian scientific study looked at the mechanism of action of olive polyphenols – the why and how of the way they work, and found that the olive oil phenolic extract (OOPE) affects cells by stopping inflammation and oxidative damage that set up the conditions for tumor growth. What’s really interesting about this is that olive polyphenols help strengthen and preserve blood vessels for cardiovascular health, but interfere with the process that creates blood vessels for tumors. That’s pretty amazing. It appears to know exactly what the body needs to repair itself and where the work needs to be done.

Brain Preservation

Aside from helping to stop tumor growth, olive polyphenols may also help preserve the delicate functioning of the brain and prevent Alzheimer’s Disease (AD). Research shows that the brain protective effects of olive compounds are due, in part, to their anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects – but those aren’t the only reasons.

Research has found that olive components boost levels of the critical antioxidant glutathione, and stop oxidative damage in the brain. However, there are probably still other ways that these compounds are protecting brain cells that have yet to be explored.

In fact, researchers are examining the many ways that olive compounds stabilize cells and slow the aging process throughout the body, and even how they boost the immune system.

Get Olive Results Without Adding Many Calories

I think that olive polyphenols are essential ingredients for healthy aging. You really don’t need a lot to make a big difference, but for some people, getting in that much olive oil every day can be a challenge. That’s why I think that the polyphenol extracts of olives may be the best bet for anyone who doesn’t want to add the caloric load of multiple tablespoons of oil each day (about 120 calories per tablespoon) to their diet. It is like getting some of the best components of the Mediterranean diet in a virtually calorie-free form.

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