

# Olive Leaf

This humble herb may be the key to quenching those inflammatory chemicals in the body which set the stage for a host of chronic illnesses.

**Dominique Finney, ND**

**O**live oil has been long known for its anti-inflammatory properties, along with flax, hemp, and walnut oils, which are also high in omega-3 fatty acids. Although inflammation has long been linked to arthritis and gum disease, the idea that inflammation underlies a variety of other chronic diseases – ranging from diabetes and heart disease to cancer – is a relatively new one. Now olive leaf extract (*Olea europaea*) is also being

**LOWERING LEVELS of inflammatory C-reactive protein (CRP) lessens the risk of heart attack from atherosclerosis.**

praised for its superior ability to soothe the inflammatory response.

Olive leaf extract has been a favourite in natural first aid kits for years, both as a treatment for wounds and skin infections, as an energy-boosting tonic, and as a preventive against colds and flu. It has powerful

antioxidant, antiseptic, astringent, and antimicrobial properties, which have been shown to help fight germs and speed healing. It has also been employed as a diuretic (to increase the flow of urine), and as an emollient (to soothe skin disorders).

**HOW IT WORKS** Olive leaf extract is a rich source of vitamins and trace minerals, including vitamin C, beta-carotene, selenium, chromium, and zinc. It also contains phenolic compounds – oleuropein, hydroxytyrosol, tyrosol, rutin, luteolin, catechin, and apigenin – which are considered responsible for its therapeutic effects. According to a study conducted by Ray and Julian Archer at the Southern Cross University, these compounds have a free radical-scavenging ability comparable to that of lycopene. This study also showed that olive leaf extract has an antioxidant capacity 400 per cent greater than that of vitamin C, and almost double that of green tea and grapeseed extracts. As oxidation is involved in many disease processes, this characteristic explains olive leaf extract's success in countering them.

**WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY** Dr Lesley Stevenson, principal investigator of the olive leaf combined university project (see box 'Cancer Breakthroughs') and manager of the Natural Products Pharmacology Unit at Southern Cross University states: 'Olive leaf extracts have potential as an intervention in all disease processes that involve

inflammation, notably cardiovascular disease, arthritis, and cancer.' Dr David Colquhoun, renowned Brisbane cardiologist and Mediterranean diet specialist adds: 'The recent findings about olive leaf extract's antioxidant capacity are a highly significant discovery. In the future, olive leaf extract may well become a first-line treatment for blood pressure, cholesterol, and respiratory problems. You don't need to be an expert to realise that a product with hundreds of times the antioxidant power of extra virgin olive oil is likely to have a vital place in the treatment of disease and in keeping people healthy.'

**DOSAGE** Olive leaf is available as a concentrated extract and as a tea. Buy the extract from a qualified herbalist, and take it as prescribed. The herbalist may combine olive leaf extract with other immune-boosting herbs, such as echinacea root, astragalus and andrographis to ward off colds and flu. The extract may also be used topically for skin infections and burns. To make olive leaf tea, combine 1 tablespoonful dried leaf (or 3 fresh) with 200 ml boiling water and infuse for 10 minutes; strain and drink.

Dominique Finney is a naturopath and herbalist based on the Sunshine Coast, where she manufactures organic herbal medicines; call 0409 765 033, or visit [www.medicineroom.net](http://www.medicineroom.net). Dom is also the author of *The Wellness Zone*, available in good bookstores.

Visit [www.olea.com.au](http://www.olea.com.au) for more information on Australian research into olive leaf.

## CANCER BREAKTHROUGHS

- A collaborative study between the Southern Cross University, the University of Queensland, and the Australian Centre for Complementary Medicine Education and Research (ACCMER) confirms olive leaf extract's powerful immuno-modulatory, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory effects.
- In another preliminary study, olive leaf extract has shown promising results against prostate and breast cancer cells. Further laboratory work is required prior to clinical trials.
- A Californian study published in July 2005 shows convincing evidence of the therapeutic effect of olive leaf extract on tumours in mice.

