

IN PROFILE

A new leaf on life

Olive leaf extract is rapidly becoming a popular 'all-round' natural remedy around the globe. But what exactly is it, how do you use it, and what health benefits does it have? **Olivia Richardson** explains.

Olive leaf extract is just that — a liquid-, tablet- or capsule-form extract from olive tree leaves. Liquid olive leaf extracts from fresh leaves (as opposed to ones made from dried leaves and powders) contain a broad spectrum of natural compounds, have more than 40 times the concentration of antioxidants in olive oil, and are more than twice as powerful as green tea extract.

'Olive leaf extract has three primary actions,' says naturopath Chevonne Clasen. 'It is hypotensive (it can help to lower blood pressure), it is antimicrobial (it helps to kill off bacterial and viral infections) and it is antioxidant in function — so helps to slow down the ageing process. It is most commonly used for hypertension (high blood pressure) and infections.'

It also improves winter wellness, strengthens the immune system, is anti-inflammatory (e.g. helps improve arthritis), contains powerful antioxidant and free-radical-scavenging properties, is beneficial for the heart and cardiovascular

health, helps relieve fevers, and has mild astringent properties.

And that's not all — an Australia-wide public trial of fresh olive leaf extract involving around 2000 health practitioners, pharmacy and healthfood store staff showed that 88 per cent of participants noticed health improvements including the following -increased energy; reduced cold, flu and sinus congestion symptoms; joint pain relief, improved skin, less aching muscles and enhanced general wellbeing.

Side effects and cautions

'It may cause gastrointestinal upsets, which is usually resolved if you dilute the liquid herbal extract in some water; plus have it after food if this occurs (herbs are generally best taken before food, unless it is known to upset the stomach). There are no known contraindications with other medications and it is safe in pregnancy and breastfeeding,' says Clasen.

Julian Archer from Olive Leaf Australia (OLA), which operates the world's largest and specialised olive leaf grove, says that people may also feel what's known as the 'healing effect' commonly experienced when detoxing.

'Olive leaf extract can have a detoxifying effect, so when it goes into the body, it may kill bacteria and other microbes that shouldn't be there. The body then has to try and excrete the dead microbes and if it can't (maybe the person's not drinking enough water to flush the toxins out), they can get mild headaches, nausea, and possibly some aching in the joints, over the first few days while they're detoxing,' he said.

Some practitioners recommend that people taking blood pressure medication should talk to their doctor about doses before taking the extract because of its potential vasodilatory and blood pressure lowering effects.

High quality extract

Research indicates that an olive leaf extract's antioxidant strength is more potent when made from fresh leaves, rather than from dried leaf or reconstituted from powders.

According to Mr Archer, OLA's Olive Leaf Extract is the only one in the world

extracted directly from fresh leaves.

He explains the benefits like this: 'If you go to the shop and ask for a freshly squeezed orange juice and they give you a reconstituted juice, you feel pretty ripped off because you know the health benefits are there in the fresh product — the freshly squeezed juice. And it's the same with olive leaf extracts'.

The company established a strong foundation for its product by experimenting with a wide variety of olive leaves in order to create its most potent, current version.

'When we first started in this industry, no one in the world knew which variety of olives were the best for medicinal properties of the leaf. So, we planted 60 different varieties from 12 countries in a scientific research grove on our property in Queensland,' Mr Archer said.

'We then made a separate olive leaf extract from every one of the 60 varieties and had them tested to see which compounds they each specifically contained, and from that, we were able to identify which varieties were the best — not for their oil or their fruit, but for the healing compounds in their leaves. Then we reproduced those varieties and planted 550,000 trees.'

According to Mr Archer, the Natural Products Pharmacology Unit at Southern Cross University completed the extract's first-ever antioxidant capacity tests in 2005 and found that OLA's fresh leaf extract had an antioxidant capacity 400% more powerful than vitamin C.

Retail sales of the OLA product are booming, at around \$16 million a year, he said.

Olive leaf extract:

- provides general winter wellness;
- strengthens the immune system;
- is anti-inflammatory (e.g. helps improve arthritis);
- contains powerful antioxidant and free-radical-scavenging properties;
- is beneficial for the heart and cardiovascular health;
- helps relieve fevers; and
- has mild astringent properties.