



olive leaf

the faithful fighter

The latest natural product to be gaining popularity is olive leaf extract (OLE). It appears that for many, reaching for a bottle of OLE rather than a bottle of antibiotics is proving an effective way to deal with Winter ills. Here we review the evidence and look in detail at what makes this product so unique.

The olive plant has been used widely as a folk medicine in countries such as Spain, Italy, France, Greece, Israel, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey, and the Mediterranean islands. Over 200 Biblical references to olive suggest its medicinal use dates back to ancient times. Today, the olive plant is most well known for its fruit crop and oil. The Mediterranean region produces approximately 98 per cent of the world's total olive crop. More recently, olive plantations have been developed in Australia and research

is now being undertaken to identify the best varieties suited to the subtropical climate.

The good oil

Olives and olive oil are important components of the Mediterranean diet and have been scientifically investigated for their health-giving effects. Olive oil, in particular, has health benefits that include reduction of risk factors for heart disease, prevention of several varieties of cancers, and modification of immune and inflammatory responses. Olive oil is a typical functional food, it is known for its high levels of monounsaturated fatty acids and is also a source of phytochemicals such as polyphenolic compounds, flavonoids, squalene, betacarotene and vitamin E. Extra-virgin olive oil is particularly rich in phenolic anti-oxidants.

The extract even better?

OLE contains various trace elements vital to good health, such as selenium, chromium, iron, zinc, vitamin C, betacarotene and a wide range of amino acids. Most importantly, it contains numerous phenolic compounds, such as oleuropein. Unlike the olive fruit, olive leaf does not contain significant amounts of monounsaturated fatty acids, oleic acid or squalene.

Olive phenolics and flavonoids are strong anti-oxidants. In fact the most active flavonoids in OLE exert anti-oxidant effects up to 2.5 times more than those of vitamins C and E.

It is important to note that not all olive products contain the same concentration of phenolic compounds. Only OLE and olive oil marketed as extra-virgin olive oil are considered superior sources.

Oleuropein – the key active

For several decades, studies conducted on active constituents in olive leaf have found that many exert significant biochemical effects. In particular, oleuropein and its derivatives have received much attention. Originally isolated in 1908 oleuropein is the phenolic constituent responsible for the typically bitter and strong aroma associated with olives and olive oil and leaf.

Oleuropein and its derivatives have a variety of roles including anti-inflammatory activity, dilates blood vessels, lowers blood pressure, prevents platelet aggregation (reducing the risk of blood clots), calms nervous and muscular spasms and antimicrobial activity against a variety of viruses, bacteria, yeasts and fungi.

Luteolin is another key constituent in OLE

that exhibits anti-inflammatory activity and anti-allergy effects.

Effects on blood pressure and glucose

Research has confirmed the blood pressure lowering effect of olive leaves and it was considered well tolerated in trial patients.

OLE has also demonstrated hypoglycaemic activity. Oleuropein is thought to produce the anti-diabetic activity. Researchers have suggested potentiation of glucose-induced insulin release and increased peripheral uptake of glucose as the most likely mechanisms of action. Clinical studies are not yet available, however anecdotal evidence suggests people are using it as an adjunct to dietary modification in type-2 diabetes.

Anecdote outweighs scientific evidence

Overall, a review of the literature reveals that the number of published clinical trials is sparse; however, the amount of anecdotal evidence is constantly building. Anecdotal reports suggest people are tak-

ing OLE to prevent or treat a cold quickly and effectively; improve energy levels; help manage conditions characterised by inflammation, such as asthma and musculoskeletal pain; or are using it as a gargle for relief of sore throat.

Some practitioners consider recommending it for its anti-oxidant properties, as adjunctive treatment for patients with mild high blood pressure or type-2 diabetes, and as both prevention and a treatment for upper respiratory infections.

Clearly, there is much we still do not know about OLE, however the current laboratory studies together with traditional and anecdotal evidence suggests some of its uses may be justified.

Safety notes

Before you commence taking OLE, you should check with your healthcare professional if you are taking other medications.

When first taking OLE, there is a small chance you may suffer some symptoms such as fatigue, headaches or flu-like symptoms, this is your body



DID YOU KNOW?

- The recommended dose for adults is 5 ml (one teaspoon) three times daily. Children should take half that dose. Tablets and capsules are also available.
- Taking half an hour before food is ideal, though if this causes slight nausea then take with food.
- Drink plenty of water between doses.
- If you find the flavour too strong, dilute it with fruit juice.
- Generally you will need to take OLE for a month before you see a response, such as improvements in general health and energy levels.

detoxifying, as the OLE goes about its job killing off the nasty bugs in your system!