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Anti-Cancer Properties of Olives Revealed in Two Recent Studies

Wednesday, February 11, 2009 by: Reuben Chow, citizen journalist
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(NaturalNews) Two recent studies have suggested that compounds found in olives could be useful as anti-cancer weapons. One study had found that a compound in olive skin acts against colon cancer cells, while the other found that compounds in olive oil act against breast cancer cells.

Maslinic Acid in Olive Skin works against colon cancer cells

Maslinic acid is a triterpenoid compound found in olive skin. In the first study, a combined team comprising researchers from the University of Barcelona and the University of Granada showed that treatment using maslinic acid could slow down cell growth as well as cause apoptotic death in [colon cancer](#) cells.

What is apoptosis? Simply put, apoptosis is a form of programmed cell death, and is an important mechanism for the body to mop up unhealthy or dangerous cells. The process of apoptosis is often also described as cells "committing suicide". Many compounds have anti-cancer effects because they are able to induce apoptosis in cancerous cells.

Already, numerous studies in recent years have shown that triterpenoid compounds can hinder the transformation of normal cells into cancerous cells by intervening in various pathways. These include carcinogen activation and DNA repair. Such compounds were also discovered to induce apoptosis in [cancer cells](#).

Triterpenoid compounds can be found in many types of plants, while maslinic acid itself is present in certain plants with medicinal properties. In olive skin, however, the concentration of maslinic acid could be as high as 80%.

ScienceDaily.com summed up maslinic acid by stating that it is a "novel natural compound and it is able to induce apoptosis or programmed death in human HT29 colon-cancer cells via the intrinsic mitochondrial pathway".

Polyphenols in Extra-Virgin Olive Oil works against breast cancer cells

The other study, jointly conducted by researchers from the Catalan Institute of Oncology in Girona and the University of Granada, found that certain plant [chemicals](#) found in extra-virgin [olive oil](#) can fight breast [cancer](#). Extra-virgin

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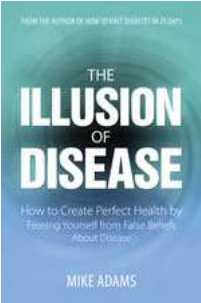
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olive oil is produced by cold-pressing [olives](#) without using chemicals, a process that preserves beneficial compounds which would otherwise be lost.

The study team split olive oil in "fractions", each containing different plant compounds, and then tested the effects of these "fractions" against breast cancer cells in the lab. And they found that all the fractions inhibited the gene HER2, which promotes breast cancer; compounds in olive oil called "polyphenols" caused cells which had overactive HER2 to undergo apoptosis.

The effects of the olive compounds on breast cancer cells are somewhat similar to that of [Herceptin](#), a well-known cancer drug, which also works on the HER2 gene. Herceptin, however, is said to be only selectively effective on some patients.

Discussion

There are a couple of key points to note on the findings of these studies. Firstly, while the said compounds were found to have anti-cancer effects on malignant cells, the observed effects were obtained in-vitro, and may not be easily replicated in the human body. As the researchers from the second study wrote: "The active phytochemicals [...] exhibited tumoricidal effects against cultured breast cancer cells at concentrations that are unlikely to be achieved in real life by consuming olive oil."

In both of the studies, the researchers have suggested that their findings could lead to the development of chemotherapeutic agents in the treatment of cancer (Read: chemical [cancer drugs](#)). While that may not interest many of us, what we can take away is the fact that olives can form a part of a cancer-fighting and health-promoting diet. In fact, their beneficial properties could help explain why Mediterranean diets, which are rich in olives and olive oil, have been linked to lower cancer risk.

Conclusion

Bottom line? In a bid to prevent or beat cancer, it is not very wise to go loading up on insane amounts of olives or olive oil, because that is unlikely to work. Instead, olives, together with other foods which contain natural cancer-fighting compounds, can form a key component of our daily diet. They are cheap; they are effective; and they are [food](#), which we need to eat anyway, and are unlikely to harm us. As Hippocrates once said, let food be our medicine.

Of course, there are other aspects of a cancer-fighting lifestyle, including sufficient amounts of pure water, fresh air, rest, exercise, and avoidance of harmful substances like cigarette smoke and alcohol.

As for using compounds found in olives to develop new cancer drugs, well, the world has been waiting for breakthrough cancer drugs for decades - how long do you want to carry on waiting?

Sources

Olive Skins Provide Natural Defense Against Colon Cancer, Study Suggests (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/release...>)

Now olive oil can combat breast cancer (<http://www.metro.co.uk/news/article...>)

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About the author

Reuben Chow has a keen interest in [natural health](#) and healing as well as personal growth. His website, [All 4 Natural Health](#), offers a basic guide on natural [health](#) information. It details simple, effective and natural ways, such as the use of [nutrition](#), various [herbs](#), [herb remedies](#), supplements and other [natural remedies](#), to deal with various health conditions as well as to attain good health. His other websites also cover topics such as [depression help](#), [inspiration](#), as well as [cancer research and information](#).


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