

Olive oil's heart effect identified

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Spanish scientists say they have located the micronutrients in olive oil that make it a good heart protector.

Mediterranean diets have long been hailed as cutting heart attack risk. A team of Spanish researchers believes this is partly because of compounds called phenols that have anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and clot-preventing powers.

Virgin or extra virgin olive oils are best because they have the highest phenol content, a report in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology says.

In their study, Dr. Juan Ruano and colleagues compared the effect of consuming phenol-rich olive oil, against olive oil with most of its phenol content removed. They tested it on a group of 21 volunteers with high cholesterol, a known heart disease risk factor.

Blood vessel response and function was improved for the first few hours after the high-phenol olive oil meal.

This improvement was associated with increased levels of a molecule called nitric oxide.

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