

Nuisance or nutrient? Kudzu shows promise as a dietary supplement

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Kudzu, a nuisance vine, shows promise as a dietary supplement that fights an unhealthy condition called metabolic syndrome. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Kudzu, the nuisance vine that has overgrown almost 10 million acres in the southeastern United States, may sprout into a dietary supplement. Scientists in Alabama and Iowa are reporting the first evidence that root extracts from kudzu show promise as a dietary supplement for a high-risk condition — the metabolic syndrome — that affects almost 50 million people in the United States alone. Their study appears in the current issue of *ACS' Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*.

J. Michael Wyss and colleagues note in the new study that people with metabolic syndrome have obesity, high blood pressure, [high blood cholesterol](#), and problems with their body's ability to use insulin. Those disorders mean a high risk for heart attacks, strokes, and other diseases.

Scientists have been seeking natural substances that can treat the metabolic syndrome. The new study evaluated kudzu root extracts, which contain healthful substances called isoflavones. People in China and Japan long have used kudzu supplements as a health food.

The study found that a kudzu root extract had beneficial effects lab rats used as a model for research on the metabolic syndrome. After two months of taking the extract, the rats had lower cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar, and insulin levels that a control group not given the extract. Kudzu root "may provide a [dietary supplement](#) that significantly decreases the risk and severity of stroke and cardiovascular disease in at-risk individuals," the article notes.

More information: "Chronic Dietary Kudzu Isoflavones Improve Components of Metabolic Syndrome in Stroke-Prone Spontaneously Hypertensive Rats," [Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry](#)

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