

Take This to Heart... Olive Oil and Coronary Heart Disease

Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), otherwise known as heart disease, is the leading cause of death in both men and women in the United States. Roughly 13 million people in the U.S. have CHD and more than a half-million Americans die from CHD annually. Research shows that one out of every two men, less than 40 years of age, will develop CHD. Do those statistics startle you? There's good news. You can help reduce your heart disease risk by making smart choices about the foods you eat.

The main cause of CHD is a thickening and hardening of your arteries due to plaque deposits. Plaque is made up of fat, cholesterol, calcium and other substances from our blood. The four main areas of nutrition that affect your heart disease risk are: fat, cholesterol, fiber and sodium. So therefore, your diet has a huge impact on your heart disease risk. It can either increase or decrease your risk of heart disease. While there are multiple nutrients that impact your heart disease risk, this article will focus on fat's role only.

Olive oil is considered a "good" fat because it's high in monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs). Studies have shown that MUFAs, when substituted for saturated fats, help lower "bad" cholesterol or LDL, and increase "good" cholesterol or HDL. "Good" cholesterol helps deliver cholesterol from other areas of our bodies to our liver where it's then removed from the body. Whereas "Bad" cholesterol or LDL, moves cholesterol from our liver and deposits it in our arteries, which can lead to blockages that can cause CHD. With this information, the Food and Drug Administration released a qualified health claim in 2004 about olive oil: "Limited and not conclusive scientific evidence suggests that eating about 2 tablespoons (23 grams) of olive oil daily may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease due to the monounsaturated fat in olive oil. To achieve this possible benefit, olive oil is to replace a similar amount of saturated fat and not increase the total number of calories you eat in a day."

There's more good news. Because of this intriguing link between olive oil and heart health, researchers have dug deeper and have found gold. Newer research suggests that phenolic compounds like those found in virgin olive oils may contribute to better heart health. Phenolic compounds are plant-based compounds, which researchers believe may have anti-clotting, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties—all of which can improve heart health.

Has heart disease hit close to home? Why not decide to take small steps toward better heart health. You can make simple changes, like substituting olive oil for shortening or butter and deciding to cook at home more and eat out less. So go ahead—be heart smart—you and your family will be glad you did.

Sources:

American Heart Association: www.americanheart.org

Covas, M.I. et al. The Effect of Virgin Refined Olive Oils on Heart Disease Risk Factors (Summaries for Patients). *Ann Int Med* 2006;145(5) I-53.

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute: www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Webmd: www.webmd.com

Food and Drug Administration: <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/news/2004/NEW01129.html>

THE ABOVE INFORMATION IS BEING USED WITH PERMISSION FROM SALVO (An Italian Company that exports olive oil to the U.S., under the brand name of Flippo Berio.)

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