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health

WHAT'S IN THE BOTTLE?

## Olives in a pill offer antioxidants, no fat

BY DEBBE GEIGER

The product and what it's marketed for: Olivenol is a dietary supplement made from the juice and pulp of organic olives. It's marketed by CreAgri in Hayward, Calif., as a powerful antioxidant with all the benefits of olive oil, but without the fat and calories. One tablet of Olivenol, CreAgri's Web site says, contains as many antioxidants as four to six ounces of extra-virgin olive oil, which is often touted for its benefits for the heart.

Company founder Roberto Crea says Olivenol offers several daily benefits, including increased energy and vitality. He says recent studies and patient testimonials suggest it may lower cholesterol and help control asthma, while also protecting the brain and skin from damage caused by aging and inflammation. He also says Olivenol may reduce the joint pain and swelling associated with arthritis.

A 60-capsule bottle of Olivenol is available via several Web sites for \$16-\$20.

**What is known:** About five years ago, Crea invented a process that recovers the wastewater generated by the production of olive oil. The olive juice is processed and stabilized with citric acid, which prevents the growth of bacteria, while releasing the antioxidants.

Antioxidants are one of the

reasons that olives, and olive oil in particular, have been touted for their health benefits. Researchers believe olives contain high amounts of antioxidants called polyphenols, thought to offer protection against heart disease, cancer and aging. Crea says his patented technology releases a high concentration of polyphenols, which he says are more compatible with water than oil.

"You get 300-fold more concentrated polyphenols [in Olivenol] than you would get in the oil," he says. One of the most potent, he says, is called hydroxytyrosol.

Ruth Kava, director of nutrition at the American Council on Science and Health in Manhattan, believes "this might be a good antioxidant." However, she says, "I'd like to see some data showing it has an effect. For many years people thought beta carotene was great stuff until people did some studies and found it had no effect at all and even increased lung cancer in smokers. There is more to it than just being an antioxidant. I'd like to know if they have any good studies."

Crea points to "numerous studies" that he says confirm a daily benefit from Olivenol. Most of the studies were performed in the lab or in animals; few were performed in humans, although one is under way now. Patients with rheumatoid arthritis are being recruit-

ed for a double-blind clinical trial at Arizona State University in Tempe to see if four capsules of Olivenol taken daily will reduce the disease's pain and inflammation. Kathleen S. Matt, the principal investigator, says, "Our interest is in finding out more about the mechanisms of disease. This is an opportunity for us to actually study a product that might modify that process."

Crea says, "Mainly we got testimonials which gave us a broad range of health benefits, which we are now studying one by one. We are now putting together all the data for publication."

**The bottom line:** Although no one is disputing the health benefits attributed to olive oil, Samantha Heller, a senior clinical nutritionist at NYU Medical Center in Manhattan, says, "The problem comes when you try to distill various substances from a compound in which chemicals may work together as a team.

"We also don't know how much can be helpful as an antioxidant on a daily basis and what is overdoing it."

Crea says, "We haven't seen any toxicity associated with [Olivenol]. We know from studies in animals that you can go up to 10 or 20 capsules [per day] without any side effects."

Still, Heller says, no one knows how much is enough or too much for the body to use ap-



Olivenol is a dietary supplement that provides antioxidant polyphenols from the pulp of organic olives, which increases energy, according to CreAgri founder Roberto Crea.

propriately. A Spanish study showed that patients absorbed hydroxytyrosol and other polyphenols when they ingested less than an ounce of virgin olive oil. "Although it was absorbed, we don't know how it affects our body," she says. "We tend to forget that the oxidants the antioxidants are clinching are important to our body as well. They help fight disease. We don't want to overdo any one chemical, vitamin or antioxidant and upset the balance in our bodies."

**Alternatives:** Instead of spend-

ing money on supplements, Heller recommends using extra-virgin olive oil in your salad dressing. Kava recommends adding more olives to your diet. "I always go for the food rather than the supplements," she said. Heller agrees. "We need healthy unsaturated fats in our diets. The way these polyphenols are consumed in the Mediterranean diet is via the consumption of the actual virgin olive oil."

Debbe Geiger is a freelance writer.