



Cooking with extra virgin olive oil increases vegetable health benefits

Cooking vegetables with extra virgin olive oil can increase the release of polyphenols, a natural compound with proven health benefits, and other beneficial nutrients into the oil allowing them to be more easily absorbed by the body, according to a study by researchers in Spain.

Published in the MDPI's chemistry journal *Molecules*, the study explored the effect of olive oil on the bioactive components in tomato, onion and garlic when cooking Spanish 'sofrito' sauce. The dish, which is representative of Mediterranean cuisine, differs across the region with Italian 'soffritto', for example, made from chopped onions, carrots and celery.

The team from the University of Barcelona, biomedical research center CIBERObn and diabetes research center CIBERDEM noted that the health outcomes of a Mediterranean diet can be difficult to reproduce outside of the region, possibly because of different cooking practices that can negatively affect chemical structures and remove bioactive compounds.

A typical technique to prepare 'sofrito' is to lightly fry the ingredients, a process that the researchers found plays an essential role in passing polyphenols and carotenoids, an antioxidant with strong cancer-fighting properties, from the vegetables to the oil. In fact, the tomato-based sauce reportedly contains 40 different phenolic compounds and a high content of carotenoids.

The study noted that the oil sample taken during the 'sofrito' preparation revealed the presence of certain polyphenols not found in extra virgin olive oil, suggesting a migration and improved bioavailability. However, the underlying mechanisms remain unclear. Notably though, their presence after the cooking process indicates their stability and capacity to avoid deterioration through oxidation.

Regular consumption of polyphenols is thought to boost digestion and protect against heart disease, but only 5–10% of dietary polyphenols can be directly absorbed in the small intestine. The researchers believe that absorption percentage could be improved if they are incorporated into the oil, underscoring extra virgin olive oil's important role in the health-improving effects of the Mediterranean diet.

One of the diet's key nutrients is oleic acid, which is found naturally in many food sources and especially in extra virgin olive oil—boasting a range of 55-83 percent of this beneficial monosaturated fatty acid. In fact, Italian varieties are said to contain the highest level of this beneficial acid.

The international TAICHI project is spreading information about the health benefits of using extra virgin olive oil for cooking to Mainland China and Taiwan.

Co-funded by the EU and promoted by the two main consortia of Italian olive growers, Italia Olivicola and UNAPOL, the TAICHI project offers consumers all the information they need to understand olive oil through its website, various social media platforms and OurOliveOil APP – available in the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

Sources:

<https://www.mdpi.com/1420-3049/24/8/1555/htm>

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-06-vegetables-health-benefits-cooked-extra.html>

To find out more about the TAICHI project, visit OurOliveOil.com



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