DIABETES HERB
AS EFFECTIVE
AS DRUGS

An herb used in traditional Indian medicine to treat diabetes has been found to lower blood sugar and insulin levels as effectively as prescription drugs, a new Ohio State University study reports.

Researchers gave extracts of the herb *Salacia oblonga* to 39 healthy adults, and the results are promising. The largest dose—1,000 milligrams (mg)—decreased insulin by 29 percent and blood glucose by 23 percent.

These reductions are similar to the effects of prescription medications for diabetics.

Researchers are now trying to figure out which dose of the herb is most effective and when it should be taken relative to mealtimes. Participants took the extract with meals, but it is thought that it may be more effective if taken prior to eating.

The herbal extract binds to intestinal enzymes that break down carbohydrates. These enzymes—called alpha-glucosidases—turn carbohydrates into glucose, the sugar that circulates throughout the body. If the enzyme binds to the herbal extract rather than to a carbohydrate, then less glucose gets into the bloodstream, resulting in lowered blood glucose and insulin levels.

Lowering blood glucose levels reduces the risk of disease-related complications in people with diabetes, such as kidney disease and nerve and eye damage.

The study appears in the January 2005 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association.*

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**HERB OF THE MONTH**

*by Amber D. Ackerson, ND*

**Cranberry** (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*)

**PART USED:** Fruit

**USES:**
- Primary uses: Prevention of urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Historical use: Prevention of kidney stones, blood purifier
- Recent research: Preliminary studies suggest that cranberries may protect against heart disease and certain types of cancer, primarily through the antioxidant action of flavonoids

**ACTIVE CONSTITUENTS:** Hydroxycinnamic acid, anthocyanidins, proanthocyanidins and flavonoids

**RECOMMENDED FORMS AND AMOUNTS:**
- Cranberry juice concentrated extract: one 400-mg capsule twice daily
- Tincture (1:5 concentration): ½–1 teaspoon (3–5mL) three times daily
- Cranberry juice from unsweetened concentrate: Four to six 16-ounce (500 mL) glasses daily

**MECHANISM OF ACTION:** Proanthocyanidins in cranberries prevent bacterial adhesion to cells of the bladder wall, according to preliminary studies. Flavonoids in cranberries contribute to the red color and have antioxidant activity. In test tube studies, cranberry extract reduced oxidation of low-density lipoproteins (LDLs, or “bad” cholesterol).

**CONTRAINDICATIONS:** People on the drug warfarin, an anticoagulant, should not take cranberry. People with a family history of calcium oxalate kidney stones should not take cranberry because it may theoretically promote the formation of this particular type of stone. Conversely, a small clinical trial published in 2003 (McHarg T, et al) found that cranberry reduced oxalate excretion.

**DRUG INTERACTIONS:** Cranberry may increase the activity of warfarin.

**SAFETY IN PREGNANCY:** There are no known contraindications for taking cranberry while pregnant or nursing.