Artichoke Leaf Extract Reduces Cholesterol

Artichoke leaf extract reduced cholesterol levels after three months of supplementation in adults.* Extracts of artichoke leaf contain flavonoids, which are known to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease by preventing the accumulation of fatty deposits in the arteries. Artichoke extracts are used in Europe to improve digestion.

In this study, 73 volunteers with relatively high cholesterol but otherwise good health took 1,280 mg of the extract or placebo daily for 12 weeks. At study end, total cholesterol was significantly lower in the supplemented group, with an average decrease of 4% compared with the placebo group, which experienced an average increase of 2%.

—Laura J. Ninger, ELS

* Bundy R, Walker AF, Middleton RW, Wallis C, Simpson HC. Artichoke leaf extract (Cynara scolymus) reduces plasma cholesterol in otherwise healthy hypercholesterolemic adults: a randomized, double blind placebo controlled trial. *Phytomedicine*. 2008 Apr 16.

Milk Thistle May Impede Atherosclerosis

In a recent study, milk thistle fruit extract inhibited the oxidation of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) in a cell-culture assay.* Milk thistle is the source of silymarin complex, often used to treat liver diseases. Oxidation of LDL is an important first step in atherosclerosis.

LDL oxidation was induced chemically in cell cultures, and milk thistle extract was added to determine its effect. Milk thistle extract (silymarin) inhibited LDL oxidation by up to 86% compared with no treatment. Further, a specific milk thistle component called silibinin inhibited the adhesion of cells (monocytes) to oxidized LDL. Both effects were dose-dependent, meaning that higher doses offered a greater benefit.

If these results are verified in animals and humans, they offer great promise in the treatment of cardiovascular disease. The authors conclude, "it is possible that the extract prepared from the fruits of an easily accessible plant could be useful to prevent the progression of atherosclerotic events."

—Laura J. Ninger, ELS

* Wallace S, Vaughn K, Stewart BW, et al. Milk thistle extracts inhibit the oxidation of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and subsequent scavenger receptor-dependent monocyte adhesion. *J Agric Food Chem*. 2008 Jun 11;56(11):3966-72.

Time to Take on Time

To significantly reduce disease, we must slow the aging process, according to experts reporting in the *British Medical Journal*.[1,2]

"The change in strategy we are calling for requires a systematic attack on aging itself," they write. "Evidence... suggests that all living things, including humans, possess biochemical mechanisms that influence how quickly we age and that they are adjustable."[1]

Due to a greater life expectancy in developed countries, the increased incidence of diseases related to aging has dramatically increased health care costs. If an extended life span is combined with health, it could result in a number of economic, social, and other benefits. Further research is needed to increase knowledge of the aging process and its relationship to disease processes.[1]

The Alliance for Aging Research has called on Congress to invest three billion dollars annually into research that would increase our understanding of the biology of aging. "To those who ask, 'Can we afford to invest more in such research?'" Professor Colin Farrelly writes, "We can reply: 'Can we really afford not to tackle aging?' The answer clearly is no."[2]

—Dayna Dye

1. Butler RN, Miller RA, Perry D, et al. New model of health promotion and disease prevention for the 21st century. *BMJ*. 2008 Jul 8;337:a399.
2. Farrelly C. Has the time come to take on time itself? *BMJ*. 2008 Jul 8;337:a414.