

Researchers confirm pine bark extract could reduce cataract risk

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(Medical Xpress)—A winter after discovering Canada for France, Jacques Cartier's exploration crew started suffering and dying from the dreadful scurvy disease in 1535. But thanks to an Iroquoian healer, they were miraculously cured by a tea made from pine bark.

Nearly 500 years later, a research team from Western has found that an over-the-counter pill boasting the same antioxidants may reduce risk of cataracts – the clouding of the normally clear lens of an eye – when delivered through the correct method.

The findings were recently published in *Current Eye Research, Informa Healthcare*.

John R. Trevithick and his colleagues from Western's Faculty of Health Sciences and the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, along with Dr. Ernest Sanford, have found that treating cataracts with dietary pycnogenol shows positive results on eye lenses and no negative short-term impact.

There is still a possibility that over the long-term, pycnogenol could lead to the formation of elevated peroxide concentrations – in environments with high concentrations of oxygen or light – which could potentially activate the [antioxidants](#) and damage the lens.

Trevithick says further testing on the [pine bark](#) extract is also needed as testing in vitro (when organisms have been isolated from their usual

biological surroundings) actually accelerated cataract production, causing further tissue damage. A potential counter measure to this adverse effect could be having patients supplement with beta carotene, Vitamin C and E boosters.

According to Trevithick, combinations of pycnogenol with beta carotene and Vitamin C have already shown promising results for reducing [cataracts](#) caused by space radiation in Mars mission simulations.

"Pycnogenol has been marketed as an antioxidant for a long time but this is definitely an exciting opportunity for its healing effects if we can make this work," said Trevithick, a biochemistry and kinesiology professor emeritus.

With Canada's wealth of Jack pine trees growing from the Northwest Territories to Nova Scotia, Trevithick offers that the development of a Canadian variety of pycnogenol would make an excellent spinoff product for the country's pulp and paper industry.

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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