

Researcher Confirms Blueberries Can Improve Cardiovascular Health

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Nutritionists have long known that one of Maine's most prized and prolific natural resources, the wild blueberry, provides health benefits that we're still just learning about.

The Wild Blueberry Association of North America calls the Maine blueberry "nature's antioxidant superfruit," and cites its ability to reduce the risks for some of the nation's leading killers and cripplers — heart disease, hypertension, stroke and Alzheimer's disease.

Ongoing research by University of Maine professor of [clinical nutrition](#) Dorothy Klimis-Zacas and colleagues focuses on the potential of blueberries to protect our blood vessels from degenerative conditions.

A leading authority on the health benefits of wild blueberries, Klimis-Zacas has broken new ground in documenting that a wild blueberry-enriched diet can protect the integrity of a thin but vital layer of cells lining the interior of blood vessels that controls constriction or dilation of arteries in the [circulatory system](#). The endothelium must remain flexible to properly accommodate the body's need for increased blood flow and oxygen, or the need to restrict blood flow at times.

Damage by [free radicals](#) or disease can cause the [endothelium](#) to malfunction and constrict too often or too much, increasing blood pressure and pulse, which can be precursors for cardiovascular disease.

In other recent studies with the University of Patras in Greece, Klimis-

Zacas found that a blueberry-enriched diet also improves cognitive performance in mice. Mice fed blueberries prior to testing fared better in learning skills and memory than mice fed a control, they reported in an article in the *Journal of Behavioural Brain Research* last year.

Klimis-Zacas and collaborators at the University of Milan in Italy also are exploring connections between wild blueberries and more than a dozen markers of potential health threats.

They have found that the high levels of antioxidants such as anthocyanins, the blue pigment coloring blueberries, introduced through regular consumption of wild blueberries or blueberry extracts, can protect DNA molecules and reduce both environmental and endogenous damage by approximately 30 percent.

Provided by University of Maine

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