

Emu oil may help in common bowel diseases

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New research is showing that emu oil has therapeutic potential for the treatment of a variety of common bowel diseases in addition to the intestinal damage caused by cancer chemotherapy.

Used by Australian indigenous populations as a skin wound treatment, and anecdotally regarded as useful in reducing [bowel inflammation](#), research at the University of Adelaide has not only supported emu oil's anti-inflammatory properties, but shown that it can also help to repair damage to the bowel.

Laboratory experiments by Physiology PhD candidate Suzanne Mashtoub Abimosleh have shown that emu oil accelerates the repair process, following disease-causing injury, by stimulating growth of the intestinal 'crypts'. The crypts are the part of the intestine that produces the villi which absorb the food.

"Longer crypts and villi mean a healthier bowel that can better absorb food," says Research Leader Professor Gordon Howarth, Cancer Council Senior Research Fellow with the University's School of Animal and [Veterinary Sciences](#).

Ms Abimosleh says: "Disorders of the gastrointestinal tract, such as the inflammatory bowel diseases and chemotherapy-induced mucositis, are associated with malabsorption of food together with inflammation and ulceration of the bowel lining (mucosa).

"The variable responsiveness of treatments to these diseases shows the

need to broaden approaches, to reduce inflammation, prevent damage and promote healing."

A series of laboratory studies showed emu oil treatment:

- produced greater elongation of intestinal crypts (indicating enhanced recovery and repair) and reduced the severity of damage in intestines affected with [ulcerative colitis](#);
- significantly decreased acute intestinal inflammatory activity in non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID)-induced [gastrointestinal disease](#);
- decreased [acute inflammation](#) and improved repair of the chemotherapy-damaged intestine.

"The symptoms of mucositis - which include painful ulcers throughout the [gastrointestinal tract](#) - are experienced by 40-60% of all cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy worldwide and currently there are no effective treatment options," says Ms Abimosleh.

Professor Howarth says the next steps include clinical trials, possibly initially with patients suffering from conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome.

"We've now done sufficient studies in the laboratory to show that emu oil has potential to help reduce the debilitating symptoms of these conditions and to enhance intestinal recovery," Professor Howarth says. "We are now looking at further work to look at emu oil dosages, and whether the beneficial effects can be reproduced in clinical trials."

Provided by University of Adelaide

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