New medical use for olive oil suggested

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Spanish medical researchers say they have discovered a new potential benefit of olive oil for people suffering from peptic ulcer disease.

The scientists say extra virgin olive oil -- already providing an array of health benefits -- might help prevent and treat Helicobacter pylori infections, which cause millions of cases of gastritis and peptic ulcer disease each year.

Manuel Brenes and colleagues at Valme University Hospital in Seville cite past studies showing green tea, cranberry juice and certain other natural foods inhibit the growth of H. pylori, which infects the stomach lining. None of the numerous studies on olive oil, however, has tested its effects on H. pylori.

Brenes and colleagues used laboratory experiments to demonstrate that under simulated conditions the healthful phenolic compounds in extra virgin olive oil had a strong antibacterial effect against eight strains of H. pylori, including antibiotic-resistant strains.

"These results open the possibility of considering extra virgin olive oil a chemoprotective agent for peptic ulcer or gastric cancer," they said. However, they cautioned the bioactivity must be confirmed in vivo in future studies.

The research is scheduled for the Feb. 21 issue of the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry.

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