

Olive oil reveals its hidden virtue

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EXTRA-virgin olive oil has a similar anti-inflammatory effect to ibuprofen. That may help explain why the Mediterranean diet, rich in olive oil, protects against heart disease, cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

Paul Breslin and his team at the Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia have discovered that olive oil contains the compound oleocanthal which, like ibuprofen, turns out to be a COX-1 and COX-2 inhibitor (*Nature*, vol 437, p 45). "Structurally it's not similar, but pharmacologically it's very similar," says Breslin.

About 50 millilitres of olive oil a day effectively amounts to a low-dose anti-inflammatory, the researchers say.

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