

Nutraceuticals the new super supplements



There's a new weapon against killer diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's. Is it a drug? No. Is it a plant? Not exactly. It's a nutraceutical. Welcome to a new breed of supplements that marry Mother Nature with cutting-edge science

Let's start with the basics. After all, some of you might be asking what a nutraceutical actually is. As the name suggests - combining the words 'nutrition' and 'pharmaceutical' - nutraceuticals are products made from natural food sources that have health benefits or can prevent illness. They've been rigorously tested, using scientific methods, in the same way as pharmaceutical drugs.

Of course, scientists have known for a long time that the vitamins and minerals contained in certain foodstuffs are good for us. However, what we're now learning is which of these ingredients are helpful in fighting or preventing disease. Sometimes it's not just a single ingredient that's at work - in other words, there's some kind of chemistry going on between the separate ingredients that manufacturers have bottled up and sold.

When we talk about nutraceuticals in a commercial

sense, they're nutritional components that have been extracted or altered in some way,' explains Ian Rowland, Professor of Human Nutrition at the University of Reading.

This is why manuka honey, impressive as it is in its raw state with its antibacterial and anti-viral ingredients, is not a nutraceutical. It's a whole food, not an extract of an active ingredient. Garlic is the same. As a food, it's not a nutraceutical - but when you extract its active ingredient, allicin, and put that in a supplement, it becomes one.'

NATURAL REMEDIES

But why are these supplements becoming so popular? We see people living longer, healthier lives and we want to join the club. Also, when illness strikes, we're increasingly looking for proven, side effect-free ways to treat it. The good news is that science is now ready to deliver them. Liverpool John Moores University now has

a Nutraceutical Research Group, while Cambridge University Clinical Trials Unit is looking at, among other things, the use of lycopene extract from tomatoes, which has been linked with

extract and isolate ingredients, the more we can test them to see how they can be used to help prevent illnesses. For example, some natural ingredients have been found to lower cholesterol,

'We're increasingly looking for proven, side effect-free ways to treat illness. Science is now ready to deliver them'

lowering cancer rates.

So why are scientists suddenly so interested? One big reason is that new techniques have evolved that make it possible.

'We've known for a long time that diet and health are linked, but it's been hard to prove exactly how,' says Professor Ian Rowland. 'You can't feed people one food for the rest of their life and measure when they die and what they have died of to prove a causal relationship between an ingredient and a disease. However, the more we can

which is a marker for heart disease, or balance blood sugar levels to help stave off diabetes.'

Not only that, more money is coming into research as governments realise that if they have a unique health-giving plant or food growing in their country, it's worth investing in. This is exactly what's happening with a product called *Bergamet*. Made from a type of bergamot that only grows in southern Calabria in Italy, it's showing promise as a cholesterol-lowering





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treatment. No wonder the Italian government has spent €15 million setting up a centre for nutraceutical research.

Big business is also cashing in. By 2016, it's estimated that the UK market for nutraceuticals and foods with health-boosting additives will be worth over £1 billion - up 32 per cent in just five years. The industry is already worth about \$86 billion in the US, and it's estimated that 47 per cent of Japanese people take nutraceuticals. The best-selling botanicals in Europe include ginkgo biloba, St. John's wort, ginseng, garlic and soy, while newer extracts such as green tea, cocoa, blueberries and tomato are selling well.

KNOW THE FACTS
 Whatever the motives behind the growth of the nutraceutical industry, it means we're gaining valuable evidence for a more natural way of staying healthy. But with many products out there claiming nutraceutical benefits, how can you tell if you're picking a good one? 'Evidence is key,' says Jayney Goddard, President of the Complementary Medicine Association. 'If it doesn't have any clinical trials on the product or ingredient, I would steer clear. If the packaging doesn't state information about clinical trials, you could contact the manufacturer for copies of results of clinical trials. Ideally, the trials should be on that product.'

Asking your GP what he or she knows about a product is another option. If you're taking medication, it's vital to talk to your doctor about taking nutraceuticals as some of them may interact with prescription drugs. Jayney Goddard adds that it's important to look at the full list of ingredients, too: 'If any product is delivered in a way that means it's surrounded by fat or sugar, it's masquerading as a health product, no matter how good its data.' ■

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Holistic health

The STAR nutraceuticals

These six products are our star choices because they have human or laboratory trials backing up their claims, and they're not coated in sugar or other nasties.

ALLICIN
lowers blood pressure



Garlic itself isn't a nutraceutical but its extract, alliin, is. It benefits heart health, as it can lower cholesterol and blood pressure. In a German trial, patients with high blood pressure found that taking garlic supplements lowered it by 11.5 per cent. Cholesterol fell by 14 per cent, and harmful fats in the blood called triglycerides fell by 18 per cent in 12 weeks. To get results, a supplement must contain a high level of alliin.

Kwai Heartcare One-a-day (£5.10 for 30 tablets) provides 18mg per tablet, while **Vitabiotics Ultra Garlic** (£8.95 for 60) delivers 72mg. Both available at Boots. Note that at these doses, users may



experience side effects, such as garlic breath or body odour.

ATERONON
improves circulation and heart health



The antioxidant lycopene, found in tomatoes, is known for its health benefits – the fact that tomatoes are a staple of the Mediterranean diet is one of the reasons scientists and nutritionists believe this way of eating helps people live longer. The scientists who developed

the supplement Ateronon have taken lycopene and tweaked its chemical components to make it more easily absorbed by the body. The result is a pill whose manufacturer claims it offers the same benefits as eating 6lb of ripe tomatoes.

Past research on lycopene has linked it to lowered cholesterol, but it truly earned its nutraceutical stripes in a recent trial at Cambridge University. Researchers found that in patients with a heart condition, taking Ateronon improved both blood flow and the health of artery linings. It also increased the flexibility of the arteries by 50 per cent, preventing hardening of the arteries, which is associated with angina, heart attacks and strokes.

'We think these results are very significant,' says Professor Ian Wilkinson, who carried out the trial. 'But we need more trials to see if they actually translate into fewer heart attacks and strokes.' Try **CamNutra Ateronon** (£29.99 for 30 capsules, available from www.ateronon.com) to see for yourself.

OLIVE LEAF EXTRACT
lowers risk of diabetes



We know olive oil is good for us, but its nutraceutical equivalent is an extract of the olive leaf, not the fruit. The leaf contains ingredients called polyphenols, antioxidants that can remove the harmful 'free radical' chemicals that damage cells and tissues. Olive leaf extract is 30-40 times higher in polyphenols than olive oil. It's been shown to alleviate high blood pressure, stiff arteries and mild hypertension, but the latest trials on its effects concern its potential role in preventing diabetes.

At the University of Auckland in New Zealand, a trial of 47 overweight men who were at risk

of developing diabetes showed that taking a tablespoon of olive leaf extract each day for 12 weeks produced a 28 per cent increase in insulin production, and a 15 per cent improvement in its action.



Both indicate a lower risk of developing diabetes. Try **Comvita Olive Leaf Complex**, (£23.29 for 500ml), available from Holland & Barrett.

CURCUMIN
staves off Alzheimer's



This antioxidant is extracted from turmeric, and its most notable health benefit is its potential impact on the development of Alzheimer's. It has long been known that India has one of the lowest incidences of Alzheimer's in the world, which scientists now believe is partly down to high levels of curcumin in the diet. In laboratory tests, curcumin reduces inflammation and the development of protein plaque deposits on the brain, which are associated with the disease. Try **CurcuminX4000** (£34.99 for 180 capsules, from www.revital.co.uk), which contains a type of curcumin the body finds easier to metabolise. This is important, as other types are not as easily metabolised.



RESVERATROL
an elixir of youth



Extracted from the skin of red grapes, resveratrol could have a strong anti-aging effect. It may even lengthen the 'caps' or ends of our chromosomes, which control

how fast we age. It could also play a role in weight control, because it stimulates a hormone called adiponectin, which reduces insulin resistance. Insulin resistance makes us more likely to store fat.

Resveratrol may be good for the brain, too. A Northumbria University study found that a 250mg dose of trans-resveratrol, the most active form, increases blood flow to the brain and could therefore boost brain function. If you take it, make sure you choose



a supplement based on trans-resveratrol – the Northumbria researchers used **Biotivia Bioforte Trans-Resveratrol** (£36.95 for 60 capsules, from www.biotivia.com).

BETA GLUCANS
lower cholesterol levels



Extracted from oats, mushrooms or yeasts, beta glucans are the nutraceutical to watch. There's good evidence that they may lower 'bad' cholesterol levels, but they're best known for their ability to regulate the immune system. Research has shown that certain beta glucans boost immunity.

Dr Paul Clayton, who studies the effect of beta glucans, believes that our forefathers survived into old age, in spite of the lack of antibiotics, because their immune systems were healthier than ours. He says this decline in immunity is the result of the removal of natural yeasts from today's foods, due to our over-sanitised environment and intensive farming methods. But there's no need to go nibbling on mouldy bread – instead, look for a supplement containing compounds called 1,3,1,6 beta glucans, which are

strongly linked to immunity. One product that includes these is **Glucasan+**. You can find it at glucasan.vitalizeshop.co.uk, priced at £19.99 for 45 tablets. **SPIRIT-DESTINY**

