

An IMIM study is the key to the approval of a health claim by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

- The studies of the IMIM's cardiovascular risk and nutrition research group have been the key to establishing the protective effect of the polyphenols in virgin olive oil
- Only 20% of the health claims submitted are approved by the EFSA
- This is an important milestone for translation between research and business.

Barcelona, 24 May 2011.- At the request of the European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has issued a scientific opinion – called a health claim – on a food product, namely, about the health properties of olive oil. The statement “**consuming olive oil which is rich in polyphenols (hydroxytyrosol, 5mg/day) contributes to protecting against the oxidative damage of lipids in the blood**”, has been possible thanks to the contribution of the cardiovascular risk and nutrition research group at the IMIM (Hospital del Mar Research Institute). **The approval of this claim will enable the message about the protective effect of virgin olive oil to be included on product labels, together with the daily consumption recommendation so that the protection is effective.**

The EFSA is the EU body responsible for the assessment of health risks. In close collaboration with national authorities and in open consultation with its stakeholders, it provides independent scientific advice and clear communication about existing and emerging risks. In addition, the EFSA is the European body competent for making statements on the health properties of certain foods. A health properties statement is defined as any claim which states, suggests or implies that there is a relationship between a food category, a food product or one of its components and health. **Since 2002, the year it was founded, the EFSA has only substantiated 20% of the requested health claims, most of which have been in reference to active substances and not food.** On this occasion the EFSA has also approved the relationship between walnuts and the improved functioning of blood vessels and between the effect of caffeine in a state of alertness and physical resistance.

To validate a claim made at the request of one or several companies, the EFSA contacts top-level researchers in the field and they examine all of the existing scientific studies on the subject. Based on the data submitted specifically for this claim, the EFSA has concluded that **there is a cause-effect relationship between the consumption of olive oil polyphenols and protection from the oxidative damage of LDL particles.** High cholesterol is dangerous, but the

biggest danger is when cholesterol is oxidised because it can then easily promote atherosclerosis (build-up of fat deposits on arterial walls).

“Our group has been studying the effects of virgin olive oil on health for the past twelve years and we have proved that consuming olive oil increases the levels of High Density Lipoprotein (HDL), the good cholesterol, and that this is directly proportional to the polyphenols it contains”, states Dr. María Isabel Covas, coordinator of the IMIM’s nutrition and cardiovascular risk research group. ***“Also, while collaborating with the IMIM’s Neurosciences and Human Pharmacology clinical research group, we have determined that olive oil polyphenols are involved in reducing lipid oxidation, one of the main heart disease risk factors”***, the researcher adds.

The amount of virgin olive oil which must be consumed each day will depend on the amount of polyphenols contained in each oil, which can vary from one virgin olive oil to another, but in general it is advisable to consume between 25ml and 40ml daily - two or three soup spoons - amounts which can easily be consumed in the context of a balanced diet.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the researcher María Isabel Covas was recently awarded the *“1st Catalan Oils Prize for the researcher, professional or leader who has done outstanding work on the distribution of extra virgin olive oil with a Protected Designation of Origin”* which is awarded by the producers of the five protected designations of origin of olive oil in Catalonia. Dr. Covas also received the AEMO (*Spanish Association of Olive Municipalities*) award in 2009, and in the same year she was presented with the Carles Martí Heinneberg award by the Danone Institute for her track record in nutrition research.

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