

Olive Oil and the Polyphenols

These days supermarkets carry a large assortment of olive oil brands, most are from Italy with Spanish and Australian Olive Oils well represented.

Olive oil is one of the few oils pressed from the fruit, another is avocado. Other oils, such as, sunflower, sesame, linseed and canola are pressed from seeds. Unlike the seed oils, olive and avocado oils are rich in antioxidant polyphenols, especially olive oil.

On reading the label of my recent purchase - an Italian olive oil from Spoleto, in the province of Perugia, about 130km north of Rome, I was interested in the extensive technical specification printed on the back label. Such information as UV spectrophotometer readings at various wave lengths indicated the oil was not adulterated with another cheaper oil. Although technically impressive this may be, there was no mention of the polyphenol content - olive oils healthiest component.



In selecting a healthy olive oil the following characteristics are relevant:

Extra Virgin Means the free fatty acid content is less than 1% at time of bottling. A high fatty acid content is a sign that the olives were left on the ground and/or not processed soon after picking.

Monounsaturated Olive oils are naturally high in monounsaturated fats.

Date of bottling The back label should indicate the bottling or packing date (PD). It is not the Best Before date. Select an oil that is less than 12 months since bottling. The olive oil I purchased had a PD of April 2020, which considering transport and warehousing delays, was surprisingly good.

Taste and Polyphenols Unfortunately there was no polyphenol content listed on the label. Without an indication of the polyphenol content you have to run your own test. In this case you should taste it, if the oil gives you a 'bite' in the back of the throat you have made a good selection. The 'bite' is due to the polyphenols present. On the other hand if the taste is bland, the polyphenols have oxidised due to age or exposure to sunlight.

Polyphenols are health-protective antioxidants. Similar to other antioxidants, polyphenols subdue oxidative stress and age-related diseases like heart disease, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. In addition to the anti-aging properties, polyphenols are also strongly anti-inflammatory.

To gain the full benefit of the antioxidant polyphenols in olive oil use olive oil that meets the taste test.

Geoff