

A spoonful a day keeps the doctor away

Whilst enjoying the full and flavoursome taste of extra virgin olive oil, many food lovers are unaware of the amazing physical and mental health benefits of this natural wonder food and Middle Eastern speciality company Terra Rossa cannot extol its virtues highly enough.

Hanan Samara, founder of Terra Rossa and also co-star of the Sky Travel Channel's *'Sophie Grigson in Jordan'* series explains: "Extra virgin olive oil is truly a miracle food and whilst many people eat it because its tasty and enjoyable, they don't realise that by consuming it on a regular basis they can actually lose weight, reduce cholesterol, the risk of heart disease, stroke and some forms of cancer and even minimise depression. This isn't just hearsay, but has been clinically proven."

Olive oil is a huge part of the Mediterranean diet and consequently populations from this region have longer life expectancy and lower risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke compared to those living in Northern Europe and North America. Extra virgin olive oil is also rich in the Middle Eastern diet and Terra Rossa imports some of the finest quality extra virgin olive oils in the world, reaped from olive groves which date back to the time of Jesus Christ.

A study published in the Spanish journal *Pharmacological Research* by Maria-Isabel Covas found that people who consume olive oil regularly are considerably less likely to develop high blood pressure, cholesterol and strokes and hardening of the arteries and inflammation of the blood vessels (which could lead to thrombosis) were also significantly lower. Another French study of senior citizens in three cities showed that those whose diet included a lot of olive oil had a 41% lower risk of stroke compared to those who had never consumed it.

Contrary to belief that eating all fats and oils leads to weight gain, extra virgin olive oil has actually been found to have a thermic effect (heat producing) which is burned off as energy rather than stored by the body as fat and this also helps us to burn off other fats more efficiently – so can give a New Year calorie controlled diet a real kick start. A clinical trial in rats regularly fed extra virgin olive oil over a set period of time resulted in considerably lower body fat and higher concentrations of noradrenalin and adrenaline excretion (an important element in burning brown fat) than rats fed on corn oil or even regular olive oil.

Extra virgin olive oil is also thought to help combat depression according to the study *Dietary Fat Intake and the Risk of Depression: The SUN Project* where researchers concluded that they found a detrimental relationship between trans-fat (hydrogenated fat) intake and depression, whilst healthier fats such as olive are associated with a lower risk of suffering depression.

Hanan advises: "It is recommended that just one or two tablespoons of olive oil consumed each day is enough to reap the numerous health benefits. Some enjoy it directly from a spoon or dunked with fresh crusty bread. Alternatively, you can use it drizzled on salad, vegetables or pasta – and as with butters and margarines, the better the quality the nicer and more intense the flavour."

Ends