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Use Any Olive Oil You Like, “As Long as it Green and Bitter”

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By Julie Butler

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Olive Oil Times Contributor | Reporting from Barcelona

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) last month approved the claim “consumption of olive oil polyphenols contributes to the protection of blood lipids from oxidative damage.”

Here we speak to the leader of the research team whose investigation of EV health benefits was pivotal to the approval.

Dr. María-Isabel Covas is head of the Cardiovascular Risk and Nutrition Research Group at the IMIM-Research Institute, Hospital del Mar in Barcelona, Spain. She is also head investigator of the CIBER of Obesity and Nutrition (CIBEROE) Network of Research Groups of Excellence in Spain. Last week she won an inaugural Catalan olive oil DOPs prize in recognition of her outstanding research.

Dr. Covas explains why lipid oxidation matters and that the key to benefiting from EVOO is not to take it as a medicine. “You must enjoy it.”

Please tell us about the research that led to the EFSA approval.

Our research started about twelve years ago and focuses on the health benefits of olive oil, in particular the effects of its polyphenols on the heart. Until 2004, it had been known that olive oil was good for you but there was a controversy over the *in vivo* antioxidant power (in humans) of the polyphenols.

We started several studies with Catalan olive oil and our hypotheses were proven successful but we needed full proof, because in this area of science, for a health professional to be able to say, “take this, it is good for you,” you need evidence from randomized and controlled studies with humans. You also need to be very accurate when you determine the average daily dose necessary to get sufficient quantities of polyphenols, because the effect will be not a pharmacological one but physiological.

We therefore held an initial trial with Catalan olive oil involving about 30 healthy individuals here in Catalonia. We also did another study here with 38 people with stable coronary heart disease. Then, in order to have definitive clinical proof, we organized a European study, the EUROLIVE Study, encompassing 200 healthy