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Book Review

Olive Oil and Health, J. L. Quiles, C. Ramiez Tortosa and P. Yaqoob (editors). Oxford: CABI 2006, £75 IBSN 1845930681

Current interest in the Mediterranean diet makes this book a timely publication. The text is an excellent introduction to the broad topic of olive oil consumption and its implications for human health. This book contains fifteen chapters provided by known international experts. It is well written and structured and is an easy read that provides a wealth of useful and relevant information to those interested in the field. I have been unable to find another text that, in my opinion, covers the topic so comprehensively. This is not to say that this book has no weaknesses, but where they do exist they are minor in nature. For example, a section focusing on the bioavailability of the components of olive oil would have been most welcome.

The opening chapter focuses on olive oil in Mediterranean food, charting the spread of the olive tree and its significance to various human civilisations through the ages. Personally, I found this to be one of the most engaging chapters in the book, as it provides a historically captivating perspective.

The science starts in earnest in the second chapter entitled 'Chemical Composition, Types and Characteristics of Olive Oil' and the following chapters, 'Total Antioxidant Capacity' and 'Effects of Frying and Thermal Oxidation of Olive Oil'. Collectively these chapters provide the reader with a solid understanding of the fundamental aspects of olive oil composition, chemistry, classification, characteristics and stability and of the effects of thermo-oxidation as it relates to organoleptic and antioxidant properties. Chapter 5 explores the potential contribution of olive oil phenolics to the cardioprotection associated with olive oil and how mechanistically this might occur, while chapter 6 discusses the effects of olive oil on mitochondrial stress and how this applies to physical exercise and aging. This sets the stage for the main emphasis of the book, with five chapters that cover related themes providing the reader with an excellent understanding of olive oil and cardiovascular health, the epidemiology associated with the disease state and how choice of dietary lipids affects blood lipids, postprandial lipaemia, haemostasis and LDL oxidation. Diabetes, while considered a risk factor for CVD, is dealt with separately in chapter 11 focusing on how diabetes can be influenced by MUFA. Chapter 12 discusses and evaluates the research suggesting that olive oil can modulate the immune response and offers insight into why there may be inconsistencies between *in vitro* and *in vivo* studies. This section leads the reader effectively into the final area of the book, olive oil and gastrointestinal health. Within these last few chapters the authors provide a balanced view of the effects of olive oil on the gastrointestinal system and its regulatory molecules. This section provides a tantalising glimpse of why olive oil consumption may be able to modulate inflammatory bowel disease, but why the overall picture is one of inconsistency and doubt. The final chapter on olive oil and cancer is excellent. A few shortfalls in the coverage of the literature were noted, but in a chapter of this nature it is perhaps unavoidable.

To summarise, this is a well-written book that deals comprehensively with olive oil and human health. I will not hesitate in recommending this book to colleagues and students alike.

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