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Tree of life sows seeds of hope

If you visited a Greek physician a couple of millennia ago their advice would have been to drink a daily mixture of boiled *Olea europaea* – or olive leaf – in water to keep you in good health.

Fast forward to 2006 and it seems the Greeks weren't far wrong. While the health benefits of olive oil are well documented, a recent study by Southern Cross University researchers have discovered that olive leaf extract is a lethal weapon against human breast and prostate cancer cells in a laboratory setting.

The research was carried out by the Australian Centre for Complementary Medicine Education and Research, a joint venture between Southern Cross University and the University of Queensland, establishing a world first collaboration between conventional and complementary medicine.



Dr Lesley Stevenson from the Natural Products Pharmacology Unit at Southern Cross University.

This study follows on from last year's research where the same olive leaf extract was shown to have an antioxidant capacity 400 per cent higher than vitamin C and almost double that of green tea or grape seed extract.

However Dr Lesley Stevenson, principal researcher at the Natural Products Pharmacology Unit at SCU, was cautious about singing the praises of olive leaf

extract too highly before human trials are conducted.

"We're not talking about a cure for cancer here, but it does have the potential to help in the management of several diseases," said Dr Stevenson. "Yes, it's toxic to the cancer cells, but has nowhere near the effect of the current pharmaceutical products being used for cancer treatment. With its high antioxidant capacity it's more likely to have significant benefits for inflammatory conditions such as arthritis. Olive leaf extract may not stop the problem, but it may delay the need to use pharmaceutical drugs."

Olive Leaf Australia corporate development director Julian Archer said he was "very excited and cautiously optimistic" about the findings, and was hoping to hold full clinical trials next year on the effects of olive leaf extract in cancer treatment.