

# Scientific proof for kiwifruit's health benefits

Ground-breaking scientific research, which promises real advancements in human health, is normally associated with the latest pharmaceutical developments – not a natural food.

However, kiwifruit is the exception, as demonstrated by the finding of scientists and researchers who took part in the first International Symposium on Kiwifruit and Health in Tauranga in April.

The two-day symposium brought together nearly 200 global health experts and international media to consider the role of fruit, in particular kiwifruit, in a healthy diet.

The event, initiated by the Ridder Institute of New Zealand and sponsored by Zespri, presented research into the health benefits of kiwifruit in the areas of digestive health, health and vitamin C and metabolic health.

Among key findings presented: Kiwifruit regulates sugar highs and lows in your bloodstream.

For the first time in human clinical trials, Zespri Green kiwifruit has been found to improve digestive health function and comfort. This is through a unique combination of actinidin (a kiwifruit enzyme), fibre and other components.

Kiwifruit boosts your immunity. Eating kiwifruit daily is very effective at increasing blood levels of vitamin C as well as levels in other parts of the body.

The digestive health studies have involved trials in humans, rats, pigs and in what's known-as in vitro studies, in which parts of the human digestive system are replicated artificially in a laboratory.

## Multi-country

The clinical studies demonstrated positive results in the treatment of constipation in a range of adult populations, including healthy subjects and elderly and patients with irritable bowel syndrome.

Research on the digestive health benefits of kiwifruit is ongoing with results of a multi-country controlled clinical intervention study expected to be released this year.

The research also found kiwifruit is associated with beneficial changes in the gut which can affect the structure and function of the mucosal barrier in the colon, preventing water-soluble bacterial products and toxins passing from the colon to the blood.

Other research showed Zespri Green and Zespri Sun-Gold kiwifruit have low glycaemic index of 39 and 38 respectively. The fibre in kiwifruit increases in volume in the small intestine, causing a delay in carbohydrate digestion and absorption, resulting in a low glycaemic potency. These properties, make kiwifruit an excellent option for people with diabetes and assist with the management of blood sugar levels by carbohydrate exchanging.

Professor Margreet Viessers of the University of



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Otago, who has a long career in the study of vitamin C, immune cell function and oxidative stress, told the symposium kiwifruit is an exceptional dietary source of vitamin C. "We have found that plasma and tissue saturation can early be achieved and maintained by the addition of two kiwifruit per day."

## Whole fruit

A key point stressed by many speakers was the beneficial effects of green and gold kiwifruit are achieved by eating the whole fruit, not extracting the active ingredients of it.

Keynote speaker, Professor Jaap Seidell from Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, and the Netherlands' foremost obesity specialist, says kiwifruit, together with other low-glycaemic fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy diet, can be crucial in helping fight the epidemic of chronic non-communicable diseases sweeping the globe.

"The high and increasing intake of ultra-processed foods leads to an increase in the intakes of sugar, salts and trans fatty acids. Energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods are the most attractive option to many consumers in terms of price, convenience, taste and availability.

"This is at the expense of minimally processed or unprocessed basic foods such as fruit and vegetables.

"Today, there is general consensus that for much of the world, nutrient-poor food is a key driver in escalating rates of obesity and related chronic disease.

"Improved health outcomes are associated with diets high in nutrient-rich, low energy-dense fruit – such as kiwifruit," says Japp.

Dr Juliet Ansell, who oversees health and nutrition research for Zespri, says the findings of the research are

exciting for human health and for Zespri and its growers.

"We know that our investment in scientific research on health can be beneficial for the entire kiwifruit category – and attracting more consumers to kiwifruit as a whole is great news for our industry. Zespri Kiwifruit is furthermore differentiated from the competition through our focus on quality, delivered by the Zespri System," says Juliet.

Professor Paul Moughan, co-director of the Ridder Institute, says Zespri is to be congratulated for taking the lead in ensuring a well-funded science programme, of the very highest science quality, which is defined by independent,

rigorous science and uncompromised ethical standards.

## Grower value

New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Inc chairman Doug Brown also sees value in the research and its findings.

"In some markets it is not possible to make claims for health benefits, unless they are backed by scientific proof. "The finding of research so far for kiwifruit's role in nutrition and gut health are exciting and will help with our marketing."

Doug says proof for growers of the nutritional value of the fruit they grow is also a source of pride.

**Elaine Fisher**