

Patient Fact Sheet

GRAPE SEED EXTRACT, PINE BARK EXTRACT, AND PYCNOGENOLS (OPCs)

Grape seeds and pine bark contain similar substances called OPCs (oligomeric proanthocyanidin complexes) or pycnogenols. Pycnogenol is also the name of one brand of pine bark extract. OPCs from grape seeds and pine bark appear to be similar in strength. They have antioxidant effects (they protect cells from damage), and they help strengthen blood vessels and decrease swelling and bruising. They are available in tablets.

WHAT ARE THEY USED FOR?

- ◆ OPCs are used for **varicose veins** and **leg swelling** caused by leaky blood vessels.
- ◆ They have been recommended to prevent **atherosclerosis** (hardening of the arteries) and **heart disease**.
- ◆ They are used in Europe to help **night vision** and other eye problems including **retinopathy** (eye damage in diabetics) and **macular degeneration**.
- ◆ They are marketed for attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (**ADHD**), **allergies**, **cancer prevention**, and **wrinkles**.

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ OPCs can reduce swelling in people who have **swollen feet and legs** because of problems with their veins.
- ◆ They may also reduce swelling from **surgery** and **sports injuries**.
- ◆ They may help reduce problems from **varicose veins**.
- ◆ They may help prevent **blood clots**.
- ◆ They can improve **night vision** in people with normal vision, but there are no studies showing that they can help with **retinopathy** from diabetes, **macular degeneration**, or other eye problems.
- ◆ Because OPCs are antioxidants, they may help prevent **atherosclerosis** (hardening of the arteries), **heart disease**, **cancer**, and **wrinkles**. However, there have not been any studies to show whether they help or not.
- ◆ There is no evidence that **OPCs** help with **ADHD** or **allergies**.

(continued)

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

There have not been any side effects reported from OPCs, but allergic reactions are possible. No long-term problems have been found from taking OPCs.

WILL THEY INTERFERE WITH MY OTHER MEDICATIONS OR MY MEDICAL CONDITION?

- ◆ OPCs may prevent blood clotting, so people who have bleeding problems should ask their health care provider if it is safe for them to take OPCs.
- ◆ People who take medications or herbs that prevent blood clotting should ask their health care provider if it is safe for them to take OPCs also.

ARE THEY SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

There are no studies of OPCs' safety for children or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. There have not been any reports of birth defects or other problems.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

- ◆ Adult doses for health problems like leg swelling are 150-300 mg per day by mouth for approximately three weeks, then 50-100 mg daily after that.
- ◆ Adult doses to prevent health problems are 50-100 mg daily by mouth.
- ◆ Doses for children are unknown.
- ◆ Standardized products are available. They are guaranteed to contain a certain amount of active ingredients. Look for grape seed extract containing 95% polyphenols, or pine bark extract containing 80 to 85% OPCs.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Always tell your doctor or nurse practitioner if you are taking any dietary supplement, and before starting any new one. Your health care provider needs to know everything you are taking to help you make decisions about your health care. Some dietary supplements can cause problems with other herbs, dietary supplements, or medications.

SEE ALSO:

Complete Monograph: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/opcs/opcs.pdf>

Clinician Information Summary: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/opcs/opcs.cis.pdf>