Natural Lecithin

Lecithin is a component that contributes to our overall health and wellness. The compound is said to be beneficial in everything from treating gallstones to relieving arthritis. Many people choose to take lecithin supplements, however natural lecithin is produced organically in a number of common foods.

History of Lecithin

Lecithin, also known as phosphatidylcholine (PC), is a type of phospholipid that presents many benefits. The compound was first discovered in 1846 when a French scientist by the name of Maurice Gobley extracted lecithin from an egg yolk. In 1850, the substance received it's name from the world "lekithos", a Greek term for "egg yolk". Initially, this newfound natural lecithin was derived solely from eggs.

Through the years the interest in lecithin increased. In the 1930s there was a boom in soybean consumption, and it was discovered that a by-product of soybean processing contained about 1.8% hydrophosphatides consisting of natural organic lecithin. A process was created called "degumming" that would extract the natural lecithin from the by-product, and allow it to be commercially sold as an alternative to egg yolks.

Uses of Lecithin

Lecithin is widely used by the commercial food industry as a powerful emulsifying agent, and an additive that can extend the shelf life of processed foods. Baked goods, chocolates, salad dressings, nut butters, candies, instant soups, protein drinks and other prepared foods contain lecithin. Natural lecithin can also be added to recipes to improve flavor and act as an emulsifier.

Natural lecithin that comes from plants is generally regarded as safe. While animal lecithin may contain toxins and harmful substances and are often excreted through the kidneys, you will never face that kind of danger with organic lecithin from plants. As a result, most natural lecithin sold commercially today is derived from soybeans. Organic lecithin is sold in pharmacies and health food stores in granule, capsule and pill form. Aside from its role as a natural human supplement, the uses of organic lecithin have also expanded to include animal feeds, paints, cosmetics and metal tape.

Effects and Benefits of Lecithin

There are many important functional effects associated with lecithin. First, as an emulsifier, lecithin keeps oils from separating, and keeps fat molecules dispersed in food products. Based on these natural emulsifying properties, scientists have determined that the compound may positively affect those with high cholesterol levels in the blood stream. But while there is very little evidence to prove that scientific claim, lecithin is still hailed by the commercial food industry for its emulsifying actions. It is possible for manufacturers to use lecithin to lower the fat content of some foods, while maintaining good flavor.

Organic lecithin sold commercially is composed of a naturally occurring mixture of the phosphatides choline, ethanolamine, and insotil, plus smaller amounts of other lipids. This compound is present in every cell of all living organisms, but is particularly vital in organs such as the liver, in the reproductive tract and in muscles containing high concentrations of phospholipids.

The affect of natural lecithin on the liver is of particular interest to the medical world. It can help to keep fats in the bile and disperse cholesterol, which is why so many people believe that taking natural lecithin may be a potential treatment for high cholesterol. Lecithin supplements are also sold as a "quick fix" for weight loss.

While it's not considered to be one of the body's "essential nutrients", there is no denying the benefits of natural lecithin. Whether derived from your healthy diet or taken as a supplement, lecithin may provide positive effects for a number of health concerns. Ask your doctor if natural lecithin is right for you.