SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.688| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 10 | October 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

ROLE OF NUTRACEUTICALS IN THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

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ABSTRACT
Cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains the leading cause of death globally. Alongside diet and pharmacotherapy, nutraceuticals — defined as food-derived products with health benefits — are widely used to modulate CVD risk factors. This review summarizes mechanisms of action, clinical evidence, safety considerations, and practical recommendations for commonly used nutraceuticals in cardiovascular prevention and management, focusing on lipid-lowering agents (red yeast rice, plant sterols, soluble fiber), omega-3 fatty acids, coenzyme Q10, berberine, garlic, and selected polyphenols and micronutrients. Evidence strength varies: some agents reliably lower LDL-C (plant sterols, red yeast rice, soluble fiber), while outcome data (hard CVD end-points) are clearer for only a few agents and remain mixed for others (omega-3s). Safety, standardization and interaction potential are important clinical considerations. Overall, nutraceuticals can be useful adjuncts for CVD risk reduction in specific contexts but should not replace guideline-directed therapies for high-risk patients.

KEYWORD: *Methods,Evidence by neutraceuticals,Safety,Standardization and intraction,Practical clinical recommendation.*

INTRODUCTION

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention is achieved through risk-factor modification (lipids, blood pressure, glycemia, smoking cessation, diet, and exercise) and pharmacotherapies when needed. Many patients and clinicians turn to nutraceuticals—concentrated bioactive food components—to help lower LDL-C, reduce inflammation, improve endothelial function, or modulate other risk markers. This review summarizes the current evidence (efficacy, mechanisms, safety) for major nutraceuticals relevant to CVD prevention and secondary management.

METHODS (BRIEF)

This review synthesizes recent systematic reviews, meta-analyses, randomized controlled trials, and guideline statements on nutraceuticals and CVD through searches of medical databases and high-quality reviews published in the last ~10 years (primary focus on 2019–2025 literature for up-to-date evidence). Key topics covered: lipid-targeting nutraceuticals, omega-3 fatty acids, mitochondrial cofactors (CoQ10), plant alkaloids (berberine), garlic, fibers, phytochemicals and micronutrients. (Specific references appear in the reference list below.)

MECHANISMS OF ACTION — OVERVIEW

Nutraceuticals affect cardiovascular risk through several biologic mechanisms:
* Inhibition of cholesterol synthesis or intestinal cholesterol absorption (e.g., red yeast rice—monacolin K; plant sterols).
* Modulation of triglyceride metabolism and anti-inflammatory effects (omega-3 EPA/DHA).
* Mitochondrial bioenergetic support and antioxidant effects (Coenzyme Q10).
* Activation of AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK), improving lipid and glucose handling (berberine).
* Soluble fibers (psyllium, β-glucans) reduce LDL by binding bile acids and altering cholesterol metabolism.

EVIDENCE BY NUTRACEUTICAL

1. Red Yeast Rice (RYR) — Lipid Lowering and Outcomes

RYR contains monacolin K (chemically identical to lovastatin). Multiple meta-analyses and systematic reviews show consistent LDL-C reductions (commonly ~15–34% depending on preparation and dose) and some trials suggest reduced ASCVD events in secondary prevention formulations. RYR can therefore exert statin-like effects and shares similar interactions and adverse event profiles; product variability and unregulated formulations are a concern. For patients intolerant to pharmaceutical statins, standardized RYR preparations have been used as alternatives or adjuncts under supervision.

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2. Plant Sterols / Stanols
Daily intake of ~2 g plant sterols/stanols lowers LDL-C typically by 6–12% in RCTs and meta-analyses; they act by competing with cholesterol for intestinal absorption. While LDL reduction is robust, evidence for direct reduction in CVD clinical events is limited and outcome data are sparse. They are safe when used at recommended doses but caution is advised in rare sitosterolemia. Useful as adjuncts to diet/statin therapy to achieve further LDL lowering.

3. Soluble Fiber (Psyllium, β-Glucan)
Supplementation with soluble fibers (psyllium, oat β-glucan) reduces total and LDL cholesterol modestly (magnitude depends on dose; psyllium commonly shows clinically meaningful effects). Fiber also improves glycemic control and may benefit overall cardiometabolic risk when included in dietary strategies.

4. Omega-3 Fatty Acids (EPA, DHA) — Mixed Outcome Evidence
Large meta-analyses show heterogeneous results. High-dose pure EPA trials (e.g., REDUCE-IT) demonstrated substantial reductions in major adverse cardiovascular events in high-risk patients on statins, whereas many other trials (mixed EPA+DHA, lower doses) showed neutral or modest benefits. Observational data also raise concerns about increases in atrial fibrillation risk and potential stroke signal in some cohorts, highlighting the need for formulation- and population-specific interpretation. Clinical use is best targeted (for triglyceride lowering and in selected high-risk patients) and with attention to the exact formulation and dose used in positive outcome trials.

5. Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10)
CoQ10 supports mitochondrial function and is depleted by statin therapy in some patients. Recent meta-analyses and trials suggest CoQ10 may improve symptoms, left ventricular ejection fraction, and reduce heart-failure hospitalizations and possibly mortality in select chronic heart failure populations; evidence quality varies and dosing/formulation (ubiquinol vs ubiquinone) matter. CoQ10 is generally well tolerated and may be considered adjunctive therapy in heart failure and when patients experience statin-associated myalgia (evidence mixed).

6. Berberine
Berberine, an isoquinoline alkaloid, shows consistent benefits on lipids (reducing LDL, triglycerides), glycemia and some inflammatory markers across meta-analyses, acting through AMPK activation and gut microbiome modulation. Trials vary in quality; berberine is promising for cardiometabolic risk reduction, particularly where glucose and lipids are both therapeutic targets, but drug interactions and standardization are considerations.

7. Garlic (Aged Garlic Extract)
Meta-analyses report modest reductions in total cholesterol and LDL with garlic supplementation; effects on hard CVD endpoints are not established. Garlic may also modestly reduce blood pressure and exert antiplatelet effects — important when combined with antithrombotic drugs. Evidence supports garlic as an adjunct to lifestyle measures but not as a substitute for pharmacologic therapy in high-risk patients.

8. Polyphenols, Magnesium, Vitamin D and Others
Polyphenol-rich foods (olive oil, cocoa, green tea, berries) and specific extracts show favorable effects on endothelial function, blood pressure and inflammation in trials, but large-scale outcome data are limited. Magnesium supplementation may modestly lower blood pressure in deficient individuals. Vitamin D has not shown consistent cardiovascular outcome benefits in RCTs and should be used to correct deficiency rather than for routine CVD prevention.

Safety, standardization and Interactions
* Product variability: Many nutraceuticals (RYR, berberine, polyphenol extracts) vary in active compound content; using standardized, tested products is critical.
* Pharmacologic interactions: RYR (monacolin K) and other agents may interact with CYP pathways and with statins; risk of myopathy exists. Omega-3s can affect bleeding risk (caution with anticoagulants), and garlic has antiplatelet effects. Berberine may affect cytochrome P450 and P-glycoprotein substrates. Clinicians must review drug interactions before adding nutraceuticals.
* Adverse events: Generally mild (GI upset) for many, but serious adverse events may occur due to contamination, adulteration (unlisted pharmaceuticals) or high doses. Regulatory oversight for supplements is limited in many countries.

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Practical Clinical Recommendations

1. Risk-stratified use: In low-risk patients with mild dyslipidemia or who prefer non-pharmacologic approaches, nutraceuticals (plant sterols, soluble fiber, certain RYR preparations) can be considered alongside diet/exercise. For high-risk or established CVD, guideline-directed pharmacotherapy (statins, ezetimibe, PCSK9 inhibitors) remains primary; nutraceuticals may be adjunctive.
2. Formulation and dose matter: Use products whose formulation/dose match those tested in positive RCTs (e.g., specific high-dose EPA preparations for outcome benefit).
3. Safety checks: Check for drug interactions (statins, antiplatelets, anticoagulants), advise on quality (third-party testing), and monitor lipids and adverse effects after initiation.

Gaps and Future Research

High-quality, large randomized trials with standardized products and hard CVD endpoints are lacking for many nutraceuticals. Comparative effectiveness against standard pharmacotherapy and long-term safety studies are priorities. Personalized approaches (genotype, baseline nutrient status) may improve targeting of nutraceutical therapy.

CONCLUSION

Nutraceuticals offer potential complementary tools to reduce CVD risk factors: several reliably lower LDL-C (plant sterols, soluble fiber, RYR) while others (omega-3 EPA, CoQ10, berberine) show benefit in specific contexts. However, heterogeneity of products, variable quality of evidence for hard outcomes, and interaction/safety concerns limit blanket recommendations. Use nutraceuticals judiciously as adjuncts to lifestyle modification and evidence-based pharmacotherapy, especially in high-risk patients where replacing established therapy would be unsafe.

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