

MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGHS

Fertility from the Forest

An extract from the bark of a pine tree that grows along the coast of southwestern France may improve the health of sperm in men with fertility problems. The extract, called Pycnogenol, is one of the most potent antioxidants known. Researchers in West Orange, New Jersey, gave 19 men with fertility problems 200 milligrams of Pycnogenol daily for three months. The patients' semen samples were examined at the beginning and end of the study. The researchers found that the antioxidant significantly improved the quality and function of sperm. The likely reason: Pycnogenol protects sperm from the oxidative damage that threatens all cells (something like the rust that occurs when you leave a shovel outside). The results of the study were published in the October 2002 issue of the *Journal of Reproductive Medicine*. Pycnogenol is sold as an over-the-counter supplement in drugstores. ■

The supplement comes from the bark of the tree.



Pycnogenol, a mix of bioflavonoids (antioxidant compounds also found in fruits and vegetables), is extracted from these maritime pines, which grow on the sandy coast of France.