

Natural Health Review™

Proven Natural Health

Issue 11 - 2007

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Welcome to Natural Health Review Issue 11.

This month we feature some interesting studies on various therapies for menopause. The results are very encouraging and give women more options to consider.

We also include an exciting supplement about the upcoming Natural Health Fair in Hong Kong from 14-16 November. I will be presenting at the New Zealand focus day on "Evidence Based Natural Health." We will be launching Asia Pacific Natural Health Review and website www.naturalhealthreview.org at the event.

As always I hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Kind Regards,

Dr Shaun Holt

shaunholt@naturalhealthreview.co.nz

Omega 3 for psychiatric patients

The facts:

- Supplementation with omega-3 fatty acid may be of benefit in patients with a history of self-harm when used in conjunction with standard psychiatric care.
- In a placebo-controlled study of 49 patients receiving psychiatric care for recurrent self-harm, 12-weeks' treatment with omega-3 fatty acid reduced suicidal behaviour and improved well-being.
- Scores for hostility, aggression and impulsivity did not improve.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Self-injury is surprisingly common. However the misconception is that people who do this are suicidal but this is not true: it is usually done as a coping mechanism to relieve emotional pain or discomfort. Neither is it usually attention-seeking behaviour, as people who do this usually go to great lengths to hide their actions. Omega-3 preparations are being trialled for a number of psychiatric conditions, with some good results, and this small study also showed that there may be benefits from taking omega-3 for people suffering from depression or stress. The authors rightly point out that larger studies are needed, but this is a useful starting point.

<http://bjp.rcpsych.org/cgi/content/abstract/190/2/118>



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Acupuncture to lower blood pressure

The facts:

- Traditional Chinese acupuncture may reduce blood pressure in patients with hypertension when given in addition to regular antihypertensive therapy.
- In a 6-week study involving 160 patients with hypertension, blood pressure was significantly lower in patients who received proper acupuncture than in those who received sham acupuncture.
- The BP-lowering effect of acupuncture subsided after treatment was stopped.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Many doctors and other health care professionals now accept that acupuncture may be useful for treating some medical disorders, even if they have no idea how it works physiologically. Part of the reason for this change in opinion has been studies like this one where there is sham acupuncture ie. needles placed in random areas as opposed to the lines where acupuncture needles should be placed. This study demonstrated a reduction in blood pressure when acupuncture was performed properly, implying that the benefits were not simply due to the placebo effect.

<http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/115/24/3121>

Glucosamine in knee osteoarthritis

The facts:

- 12 weeks' treatment with glucosamine 1.5g/day eased pain levels and improved physical function in a study of 39 patients with arthritis of the knee.
- There were no patient characteristics or radiographic disease patterns that predicted pain response.
- The presence of osteophytes in the patellofemoral joint at the beginning of the study was a predictor of functional improvement.

Dr Shaun Holt:

An interesting study in the British Journal of Sports Medicine has tried to determine which people with arthritis in the knee will benefit from taking glucosamine. Overall, glucosamine reduced pain and increased activity levels. There were no strong factors that were predictive of who would do particularly well, as the study was probably too small to find these signals. However, people with a lower body mass index and certain X-ray signs tended to have better results.

<http://bjsm.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/41/7/415>

Cod liver oil use and symptoms of depression

The facts:

- A Norwegian health survey (HUSK) involving 21,835 people found that those who took cod liver oil daily had a lower incidence of depressive symptoms than the rest of the population.
- This difference existed even when factors such as age, gender, smoking, coffee and alcohol consumption and physical activity were taken into account.
- Cod liver oil is rich in omega-3 fatty acids.

Dr Shaun Holt:

At first glance, the results from this study are impressive: the prevalence of depressive symptoms was 29 per cent lower in people who regularly had cod liver oil. However, as we have discussed many times, this was an observational study and there could be confounding reasons ie. those who had the cod liver oil may have had another lifestyle factor that made them more likely to be depressed, such as their diet. This study adds to the body of data showing that fish oils may be good for mental health problems and for reducing depression, but randomized trials on cod liver oil in depression would be needed before it can be strongly recommended.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?>



Independent commentary and selection of studies by Dr Shaun Holt, BPharm (hons), MBChB (hons)

Please see Dr Shaun Holt's Natural Health Column at www.pharmacydirect.co.nz

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Effects of soy nuts on blood pressure

The facts:

- Population studies have previously shown that dietary soy may have a cardioprotective effect.
- This study of 60 postmenopausal women who followed a Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) diet found that substitution of non-soy protein with soy nuts for 8 weeks led to a reduction in blood pressure and lipid levels in hypertensive women who were otherwise healthy.
- These findings provide further evidence that dietary soy protein may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Soy nuts are made from soybeans, which have been soaked and then baked. As part of your diet they can be used in place of nuts and they have a high protein content. 60 women took part in this crossover study, where for one of the periods soy protein was included in the diet. The results indicated that soy protein does lower blood pressure and, interestingly, the higher the blood pressure, the larger the reduction from the soy protein. LDL-cholesterol was also reduced. With a blood pressure reduction of up to 9.9%, this is one of the most exciting natural health studies of the year.

<http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/167/10/1060>

Vitamin E for hot flashes in menopausal women

The facts:

- Vitamin E reduced the frequency and severity of hot flashes in a well-controlled trial of 51 menopausal women.
- At a dosage of 400IU daily for 4 weeks, vitamin E reduced the daily frequency of hot flashes from 5 to 3 and their severity score from 2.37 to 1.80 compared with placebo.
- Based on the results of this study the authors recommended vitamin E for the treatment of hot flashes in menopause.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Hot flashes are one of the defining features of the menopause, and although this may sound trivial if you have not experienced them, they can be extremely unpleasant. HRT is not without risks and this good little study showed that vitamin E was safe and effective. The study design was very good, in that the 51 participants received both treatments, separated by what is called a washout period, when the first treatment is stopped and washes out of the body before the second treatment is given.

<http://content.karger.com/ProdukteDB/produkte.asp?Aktion=ShowAbstract&ArtikelNr=106491&Ausgabe=233688&ProduktNr=223845>

Maca used as a non-hormonal alternative to HRT

The facts:

- The Maca root, long recognized in Peru as a remedy for menopausal symptoms, was shown to reduce discomfort in perimenopausal women treated for 2 months in a well-controlled study.
- Problematic hot flushes, night sweats, nervousness, depression and heart palpitations were reduced in as many as 87% of women who received pre-gelatinized organic Maca.
- These improvements were associated with changes in sex hormone levels as well as reductions in bodyweight and blood pressure.

Dr Shaun Holt:

In the Natural Health Research Review we deliberately feature products who use is supported by evidence from good studies, and products from the maca plant, found in the Andes, have been the subject of much research. Effects on sexual function have been reported and this may be due to the high concentration of proteins and vital nutrients. In this well-designed study, most of the women had reduced menopausal symptoms. There were changes in sex hormone levels and this probably explains the findings. In light of the well-known risks of HRT, this natural alternative is worth considering. Expect to hear a lot more about Maca.

<http://www.ijbs.org/User/ContentAbstractPage.aspx?VolumeNO=2&StartPage=143&EndPage=159&Number=2>



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Echinacea and the common cold

The facts:

- The herbal preparation echinacea is widely used for the common cold but its benefits remain controversial.
- When data from 14 studies were pooled it was found that echinacea reduced the risk of developing the common cold by 58%, and shortened the duration of illness by 1.4 days.
- This evidence supports the use of echinacea for reducing the incidence and duration of the common cold.

Dr Shaun Holt:

In this issue of the *Natural Health Review* we are covering both of the natural treatments that are thought to be of benefit for the common cold, with this study being published in the prestigious *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*. This was a meta-analysis, wherein all the previous studies are collated, which can be a very powerful analytical method. Many complicated analyses were performed – it gave me a headache reading them all! And the results were remarkable: echinacea reduced the chances of getting a cold by nearly 2/3 and shortened the duration by a day and a half.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?>

Vitamin C for the common cold

The facts:

- Prophylaxis with oral vitamin C ($\geq 0.2g$ daily) has little effect on the risk of developing a common cold in the general population, according to the results of a meta-analysis of 30 trials.
- But in people exposed to cold weather or to extreme exercise vitamin C prophylaxis may halve the risk of developing a cold.
- Vitamin C may reduce the duration of illness by up to 14% when started before, but not after, the onset of symptoms.

Dr Shaun Holt:

"*Vitamin C useless in combatting colds*" was the headline all around the world when this study was published....but that's not the way I read it! This was a meta-analysis, meaning that the authors got together all the relevant studies and "added them up" to find the true answer. Overall, when vitamin C was taken regularly it did not reduce the number of colds that people in the general population got. However, when the studies that just looked at people exposed to brief periods of severe physical exercise or cold, there was a large reduction in the number of colds. Further, there was a reduction in the duration of colds in those that took regular vitamin C. And so the messages are that vitamin C taken every day will not reduce the number of colds you get (although there are other reasons to taken vitamin C every day) but it will make them shorter and should be considered when you are going to be doing a lot of exercise or exposed to cold.

<http://www.mrw.interscience.wiley.com/cochrane/clsysrev/articles/CD000980/frame.html>

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Triple therapy with lactoferrin and probiotics

The facts:

- The addition of lactoferrin and probiotics to standard triple therapy (amoxicillin, clarithromycin and a proton pump inhibitor) improved efficacy and tolerability in a study of 206 patients with *helicobacter pylori* infection.
- The *H. pylori* eradication rate increased from 76% in those taking standard therapy to 92% in those taking standard therapy plus lactoferrin and probiotics.
- Patients taking probiotics reported significantly fewer side effects.

Dr Shaun Holt:

The fact that stomach ulcers can be caused by the bacteria *Helicobacter pylori* was ridiculed when it was first suggested. Then in 1981 Australian researcher Barry Marshall drank a petri dish full, developed gastritis and treated himself with antibiotics! In this excellent and important study, 200 patients with this infection had either the current best therapy, which has a 75% success rate, or the same treatment and lactoferrin and probiotics. The addition of these two natural products increased the success rate to over 90% and could be the biggest advance since that crazy Aussie!

http://www.amjgastro.com/show-Content.asp?DID=4&SessionGUID=F3CD6AD7-7482-45F9-BBC3-9F5DC8B6C5D2&id=ajg_108552007&type=abstract

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