











# Natural Health Review

Proven Natural Health

Issue 9 - 2007

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## Welcome to Natural Health Review issue nine.

This month we feature some interesting results on a survey done on the use of complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) in NZ. As we have mentioned before doctors need to know about them because many of their patients are using them.

We also look at some positive research results on the use of Tai Chi in older patients with herpes virus 3. It just shows martial arts can be of benefit in many ways.

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

Kind Regards,

**Dr Shaun Holt**

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## Use of *Boswellia serrata* extract (BSE) in osteoarthritis of knee

### The facts:

- An open-label study compared the effects of *Boswellia serrata* extract (BSE) and valdecoxib over a 6-month period in 66 patients with osteoarthritis of the knee.
- Pain, stiffness and difficulty with daily activities improved with both treatments.
- The effects of BSE were slower to emerge but lasted a bit longer than those of valdecoxib.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Resin from *Boswellia* trees has been known for a long time to have anti-inflammatory properties. Extract from the resins are also what is referred to as Frankincense in biblical terms. The results from this study would have been more robust if the study had been blinded, i.e. if participants did not know what treatment they were receiving. Despite this, the results are encouraging and new treatments for inflammatory conditions are needed as current treatments often have side effects.

<http://www.ijp-online.com/article.asp?issn=0253-7613;year=2007;volume=39;issue=1;spage=27;epage=29;aurlast=Sontakke;type=0>



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## Selenium cuts prostate risk

### The facts:

- It is believed that selenium has antioxidant properties that may potentially protect against prostate cancer.
- As part of a larger screening study, baseline serum selenium levels in 724 men who developed prostate cancer during an 8-year follow-up were compared with those in 879 healthy men of similar age.
- Serum selenium levels were not associated with prostate cancer risk in general but higher levels may reduce risk in men with a high vitamin E intake, in multivitamin users and in smokers.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

It is well known that New Zealand selenium levels are low in the soil and therefore in food produced here, but the consequences for health are not well understood. With respect to cancer prevention, there is conflicting evidence that selenium may help to prevent cancer due to its antioxidant effects or action on the immune system. This study provides some, but not overwhelming evidence, that selenium may reduce the risk of prostate cancer.

<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673607601093>



**Independent commentary  
by Dr Shaun Holt,  
BPharm (hons), MBChB  
(hons)**

**Please see Dr Shaun Holt's Natural Health Column  
at [www.pharmacydirect.co.nz](http://www.pharmacydirect.co.nz)**

## Zinc supplementation decreases incidence of infections in the elderly

### The facts:

- A well-controlled trial in 50 healthy elderly people examined the use of oral zinc supplementation (45mg elemental zinc per day) on the incidence of infections.
- Zinc reduced the number of infections over a 1-year period compared with placebo.
- Blood tests from treated patients showed zinc to have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

This was a smallish study and if the results are found in large studies then they are very important. The immune system does not function as effectively when we are older and lower zinc levels may be part of this reason. A simple zinc supplement reduced infections in the group who took it. This finding was supported from results from certain markers of immunity and inflammation in the blood tests. Some multivitamins contain zinc, or you could take a specific zinc supplement.

<http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/85/3/837>

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## Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) use in Christchurch



### The facts:

- A questionnaire given to 100 children visiting their GP or a diabetes clinic examined the use of complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) in NZ.
- Approximately 70% of children had used CAM at some stage and about three-quarters of this use was not reported to a doctor.
- Because CAM use in NZ children is high, doctors must determine what, if any, alternative therapies are being used before they prescribe conventional medicines to avoid potential interactions.

alternative therapies are being used before they prescribe conventional medicines to avoid potential interactions.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Whether or not doctors and other health professionals think alternative medicines work, they need to know about them because many of their patients are using them. This study was particularly interesting as it found many children, some with diabetes, used alternative treatments and also that they usually did not tell their doctor. As some alternative treatments can interact with conventional treatments, it is recommended users tell their health professionals about any non-traditional treatments they are taking.

<http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/abstract.php?id=2464>

## Weight loss in premenopausal women and calcium intake

### The facts:

- Overweight premenopausal women who lost weight did not lose bone mass if they maintained an adequate calcium intake (at least 1g per day).
- Despite losing 7.2% of initial weight over a 6-month period, no major reduction in bone mineral density, or increase in bone turnover, was observed.
- Absorption of calcium was adequate and not significantly affected by weight loss.



### Dr Shaun Holt:

We know that calcium supplements are important for women after the menopause, but what about before that time? And what about if women are overweight, dieting, and possibly not taking in enough calcium in the diet? Reassuringly, this study shows that sufficient calcium is still absorbed. The message therefore is to wait until menopause before starting a calcium supplement, as long as your diet is well-balanced.

<http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/85/4/972>

## Nutrient intake and risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma



### The facts:

- Most macronutrients in the diet are not associated with a risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma according to the results of a food questionnaire completed by 591 patients with NHL and 460 controls in Sweden.
- Consumption of omega-3 fatty acids, fibre, beta-carotene and alpha-tocopherol (vitamin E) appeared to have a protective effect.
- Dietary calcium and retinol were found to increase the risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma refers to a group of cancers originating from one of the types of white blood cells. Other than people known to have HIV, the cause is usually not known. In this case-control study, where the diets of people with the disease and those without the disease were compared, omega-3 fatty acids and a higher intake of dietary fibre seemed to be protective.

<http://aje.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/164/12/1222>

## Fish oil for reducing coronary events

### The facts:

- Evidence suggests the consumption of fish oils reduces the risk of dying from coronary artery disease.
- Long term treatment with fish oil (1800mg EPA per day for 5 years) was studied in nearly 20,000 Japanese patients with high cholesterol levels who were also receiving a cholesterol-lowering drug (statin) and consuming a large amount of fish.
- Fish oil plus statin therapy reduced the risk of a major coronary event by 19% compared with the statin alone but the rates of sudden cardiac death and coronary death were unchanged.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

The amount of research into the health benefits of fish oils is staggering – I could easily fill each issue of this Review with fish oil studies! This is one of the most important studies: it looked at adding 1800 mg/day of EPA to the treatment of patients with high cholesterol who were taking a statin drug, the standard treatment for high cholesterol. The study found that the EPA gave an additional 19% benefit in terms of reducing major coronary events and this was in a population that tends to eat a lot of fish anyway.

<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673607605273/abstract>

## Fish consumption can help prevent mental decline

### The facts:

- Consumption of fish slowed the natural decline in cognitive function over a 5-year period in elderly men.
- Results showed that the greater the intake of fish oil (EPA and DHA), the slower the decline.
- Further studies are required to support these findings.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

This study provides further evidence that fish oil can prevent senility. This was a large study and a dose-response was seen in the results. In other words, the more fish that was eaten, the less decline was seen in cognitive functioning. A dose-response finding such as this provides strong evidence the association between fish consumption and mental decline is real and not just a chance finding from the data.

<http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/85/4/1142>



## Use of Tai Chi in older patients with human herpes virus 3

### The facts:

- Four months' use of Tai Chi was found to improve the immune response to human herpes virus 3 (varicella zoster virus) in older patients, both before and after vaccination with VARIVAX.
- Tai Chi, combined with vaccination, produced a stronger immune response than the vaccine alone.
- The immune response was significantly better than that achieved in a group of patients given health education only.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Tai Chi is an internal Chinese martial art and is thought to promote good health and longevity. There is no doubt it can improve balance, flexibility and cardiovascular health, but can it help the immune system? This study, published in a quality medical journal, found a statistically significant improvement in immune response after having a vaccine injection. Other studies have found benefits in diabetes and ADHD and it will be fascinating to see future research.

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1532-5415.2007.01109.x>

## Garlic plus vitamin C may reduce blood pressure



### The facts:

- Garlic (2.5g per day) together with vitamin C (2g per day) reduced blood pressure (BP) to a normal range after 10 days in patients who had marginally high BP before treatment.
- Garlic reduced systolic but not diastolic BP when used alone and vitamin C had no effect.
- Laboratory tests showed that garlic combined with vitamin C improved nitric oxide production in endothelial cells.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

This was an interesting study for several reasons. The study was well-designed in that it looked at the effect on blood pressure of the garlic/vitamin C combination, as well as the individual components separately. Another interesting approach was to also investigate a possible mechanism for any benefit, using laboratory tests on blood samples. The findings indicate a benefit in terms of blood pressure reduction for the combination product and a possible mechanism by which this is achieved. Further studies are needed.

**Reference: Nutrition Research  
Volume 27, Issue 2, February 2007,  
Pages 119-123**

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