











In this issue:

-  *Fish oil capsules pack same omega-3 punch as fish*
-  *Meta-analysis adds weight to soy's bone benefits*
-  *Art therapy for cancer patients*
-  *Decisions to use CAM by male cancer patients*
-  *A novel fat emulsion for body-weight management*
-  *Maternal omega-3 consumption boosts offspring's coordination*
-  *More support for omega-3 and weight management*
-  *Exercise may boost brain's natural antidepressant*
-  *Studies show yoga has multiple benefits*
-  *Omega-3 shows benefits for fat loss in diabetics*

Welcome to naturalhealthreview.org Issue 3.

This month we feature many interesting studies related to weight loss and management. There are so many options available, it is difficult to know which ones really work. The studies included highlight some of the therapies that have had positive results.

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

Kind Regards,

Dr Shaun Holt

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Fish oil capsules pack same omega-3 punch as fish



The facts:

- This study examined whether consuming equal quantities of omega-3 fatty acids as either 1-2 fish oil capsules per day or 2 servings of oily fish (salmon or tuna) per week provide similarly bioavailable amounts.
- After 16 weeks, omega-3 fatty acid content in red blood cells and plasma phospholipids improved significantly in both groups of healthy female volunteers, regardless of which form of fish oil they had consumed.
- The investigators concluded that daily consumption of fish oil capsules enriched blood lipids with omega-3 fatty acids as effectively as 2 servings of oily fish per week.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This study is important: I always recommend that essential nutrients should come from having a good diet wherever possible. Although only a small study, it appeared that the same average daily amount of EPA and DHA, whether taken by eating oily fish or by taking daily capsules, had the same effect in terms of enriching blood lipids. This means that the choice is yours: oily fish twice a week or daily capsules.

<http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/86/6/1621>



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Meta-analysis adds weight to soy's bone benefits

The facts:

- Dietary soy isoflavones improve spine bone mineral density (BMD) in menopausal women according to a meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials.
- When data from 10 studies involving a total of 608 women were pooled, spine BMD was found to increase significantly in women who took soy isoflavones compared with placebo.
- Improvements in spine BMD were especially apparent with isoflavone intake greater than 90 mg/day and with treatment durations lasting 6 months or longer.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Isoflavones are widely believed to prevent cancer and reduce cholesterol levels and they are present in soy in high levels. Another possible benefit is in reducing the loss of bone that occurs as we get older, particular in women. This study was a meta-analysis ie. it added up the results of 10 previous studies and found that soy isoflavones definitely do reduce bone loss.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.clnu.2007.10.012>

Decisions to use CAM by male cancer patients

The facts:

- Interviews conducted with 43 male cancer patients in the UK revealed that 34 (79%) had used complementary and alternative medicines (CAM).
- CAM information was considered 'empowering' as it broadened treatment and self-care options but decisions were not always backed by scientific evidence.
- Patients must be encouraged to discuss their interest in CAM with their health professionals to avoid potential hazards.

Dr Shaun Holt:

With so much poor research on natural health therapies and poor reporting of the research in the media, people want reliable sources of information on natural and alternative health therapies, especially patients with serious illnesses such as cancer. The medical profession is not very well informed on these treatments and so they rarely recommend them. The male cancer patients who were interviewed in this study obtained most of their information from friends and relatives, particularly female ones.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/1472-6882-7-25>



Art therapy for cancer patients

The facts:

- Once weekly art therapy sessions improved symptoms of depression and fatigue in cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and are worthy of further study, according to the results of a preliminary trial.
- 19 cancer patients participated in at least 4 art sessions while undergoing chemotherapy and were compared with 41 patients who participated in 2 or fewer sessions.
- The median depression score (measured using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale) improved significantly from baseline in patients attending at least 4 sessions, as did the median score for fatigue (measured using the Brief Fatigue Inventory) although this improvement was not statistically significant.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This was a pilot study, not designed to prove beyond doubt that Art Therapy can reduce depression, anxiety or fatigue in patients with cancer undergoing chemotherapy, but to see in a small study whether there were any indications that it might work. By using several questionnaires to quantify these symptoms before and after Art Therapy, it would appear that it may help and this can be further examined in a larger study.

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/114179576/ABSTRACT?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

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A novel fat emulsion for body-weight management



The facts:

- This well controlled study showed that consumption of yoghurt with a novel fat emulsion (Olibra) helped maintain a constant weight after weight reduction in overweight women.
- 50 women underwent a 6-week weight loss period followed by an 18-week period of weight maintenance with either Olibra or placebo yoghurt.
- Placebo recipients gained weight during the 18-week maintenance period, whereas Olibra recipients maintained their weight loss and were less hungry.

Dr Shaun Holt:

There are many weight loss products on the market, but one of the differences with Olibra is that they are undertaking some very good clinical trials. This product consists of a yoghurt that contains a unique emulsion of fat. When tested against placebo yoghurt over a 24-week period, consisting of weight loss for 6 weeks and then maintenance, the weight gain in those taking Olibra was 2kg less than those taking the placebo. In other words, this product helped the trial participants to keep off weight that they had recently lost. If this is an issue with you then you may want to try it.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/sj.jjo.0803532>

Maternal omega-3 consumption boosts offspring's coordination

The facts:

- Maternal consumption of arachidonic acid and docosahexaenoic acid during pregnancy plays an important role in CNS development and function.
- This study compared prenatal availability of these polyunsaturated fatty acids (measured in umbilical plasma phospholipids at birth) with motor function at the age of 7 years in 306 children.
- Levels of umbilical plasma docosahexaenoic acid were positively related to motor function at age 7 years, suggesting that prenatal availability of this fatty acid can affect quality of movement in later life.



Dr Shaun Holt:

The most common correspondence I get is from readers wanting to know more about the potential benefits of omega-3 supplements for their children and the potential benefits if taken whilst pregnant. This study is one of the most important studies of late in this area: a large, well-designed study looking at levels of omega-3-related compounds in the umbilical cord and movement skills in the children 7 years later. A strong association was found suggesting that intake of omega-3 in pregnancy can assist in child brain development.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/sj.ejcn.1602971>

More support for omega-3 and weight management

The facts:

- Dietary fish oils reduce bodyweight gain by increasing intestinal lipid metabolism, according to the findings of a study in mice.
- In obesity-prone mice fed fish oil as part of a high-fat diet for 5 months, the increase in bodyweight was significantly lower than in mice fed a high-fat diet without fish oil.
- The inhibitory effects of fish oil on bodyweight gain were accompanied by upregulation of intestinal lipid metabolism.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This is another "basic science" study, chosen to illustrate an important part of the process of developing and validating natural health products. Although not absolutely essential, it is definitely desirable to know the mechanism by which a therapy works for many reasons, for example, a demonstrated mechanism of action adds to the likelihood that a therapy actually works. Recent studies have suggested that omega-3 supplements may help weight control and this study shows that the mechanism may involve effects on the metabolism of fats in the bowel.

<http://jn.nutrition.org/cgi/content/abstract/137/12/2629>



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

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Exercise may boost brain's natural anti-depressant

The facts:

- This study identified an exercise-related gene (responsible for encoding the VGF nerve growth factor) in the region of the mouse brain responsible for elevating mood.
- Administration of synthetic VGF caused an antidepressant effect in mice, and mutation of the gene caused symptoms of depression.
- VGF is therefore a potential therapeutic target in the development of antidepressant drugs in the future.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This study is very different to the ones that we usually feature and is included to give you a glimpse of some of the "pure science" that occurs long before products are tested on people. We know that exercise has a positive effect on mood, and by determining the mechanisms involved in this it may be possible to develop new treatments.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nm1669>

Omega-3 shows benefits for fat loss in diabetics

The facts:

- A randomised controlled study in 27 women with type 2 diabetes found that 2 months' treatment with omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids reduced adiposity and some atherogenic factors but did not improve insulin sensitivity.
- Total fat mass and atherogenic markers were significantly lower at study end in women treated with fish oil (3 g/day) compared with placebo for 2 months.
- Insulin sensitivity did not differ significantly between the 2 groups at baseline or after 2 months.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Weight gain is a major problem for people with diabetes, as are high blood cholesterol levels. The women taking 3 grams per day of fish oil in this study had a reduced total fat mass and lower levels of certain blood lipids. Importantly, these benefits occurred with no adverse effects on the diabetes control.

<http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/86/6/1670>

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Studies show yoga has multiple benefits



The facts:

- Sudarshan Kriya and related practices (SK&P) is a specific form of yoga and yogic breathing exercises used for relaxation and stress reduction.
- A Swedish study compared the effects of daily SK&P practice versus daily arm-chair relaxation on a number of mood factors including anxiety, depression and optimism in 103 healthy volunteers.
- After 6 weeks, people in the SK&P group (but not in the control group) had lower levels of anxiety, depression and stress, and higher levels of optimism, than they did at baseline.

Dr Shaun Holt:

I've never attempted the half-moon manoeuvre myself, but it is not hard to see how yoga is likely to have both mental and physical benefits, due to its combination of exercise and relaxation. In this study of a particular form of yoga, participants showed a reduction was seen in anxiety, depression and stress and there was an increase in optimism, after only 6 weeks. A larger trial would be useful and is likely to confirm these findings.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/1472-6882-7-43>

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