











# Natural Health Review

Proven Natural Health

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## Welcome to the third Natural Health Review issue, the independent New Zealand natural health publication which only includes well researched facts.

Since starting Natural Health Review I have been pleasantly surprised by the good quality research being undertaken all over the world with natural health products. In particular fish oil supplements are producing fantastic results for a variety of uses.

The process of developing any supplement is difficult. The better quality manufacturers have invested significant energy and money to make sure you get the most benefit. It's a bit like wine, just because they use Chardonnay grapes doesn't mean the wine is good - make sure you buy good quality!

Welcome to all our new subscribers and thanks to all who have recommended us to others. We hope you enjoy this month's issue.

**Dr Shaun Holt**

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## Fish oil during pregnancy

### The facts:

- Approximately 70 pregnant women were asked to take either fish oil (omega 3 PUFA) or olive oil for the second half of their pregnancy.
- The children were studied when they reached 2 ½ years of age to see how they were developing.
- The children whose mothers had taken fish oil were further developed and had better language, behaviour and hand-eye coordination skills than children in the olive oil group.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

We seem to have some research about a new benefit of fish oil every month! This was a good study from an Australian School of Paediatrics and Child Health. In dose used was 2.7 grams of omega 3 fatty acids, which is equivalent to one meal of fish per day. As well as the benefits, no adverse effects were seen. A larger study of 400 children is planned which will give even more information, including whether the fish oil supplement can prevent the onset of allergic disorders such as asthma and hay fever.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/>

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a RESEARCH REVIEW publication

## Complementary medicines in psychiatry

### The facts:

- A comprehensive review of published data suggests a number of complementary medicines are beneficial in the treatment of some psychiatric illnesses.
- Ginkgo and hydergine may improve learning and thinking ability, passion flower and valerian may have sedative qualities and St. John's Wort may be useful as an anti-depressant.
- Well controlled clinical studies are needed to investigate these claims further.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Mental illnesses are those which affect mood, behaviour or thinking. They are often due to changes in brain structure or functioning and can be caused by amongst other things drugs, genes and psychological trauma. Up to a quarter of adults have a mental illness at some stage each year. The main conclusion from this review of the medical literature was that more information is needed from good clinical research, but the use of St John's Wort is certainly effective and is perhaps the best example of a natural product that has undergone extensive medical trials and been shown to be effective.

[www.cmaj.ca/](http://www.cmaj.ca/)

## Athletes stay better hydrated with sports drinks

### The facts:

- Fourteen teenagers took part in a 2 hour tennis training session on 2 separate hot days. On one day they drank a commercially available sports drink and on the other day they drank water.
- On the day when the sports drink was consumed the body temperature of the teenagers was lower after the training session than when water was used.
- The sports drink also resulted in slightly less weight loss during the training session.



### Dr Shaun Holt:

Sports drinks are a huge industry. These products are usually designed by scientists with an expertise in sporting performance. They contain various combinations of salts, sugars and other nutrients in order to rehydrate the athlete and help performance. But are they any better than simple tap water if you are simply looking for rehydration? Most studies suggest that they are better at achieving rehydration and this study adds further evidence.

<http://bjsm.bmjournals.com>

## Vitamin B6 intake, alcohol consumption, and colorectal cancer

### The facts:

- The role of vitamin B6 in preventing colorectal cancer was investigated in a Swedish study involving over 60000 women.
- Women who consumed low levels of vitamin B6 had a 30% higher chance of developing colorectal cancer than those who consumed large quantities.
- Women who consumed moderate to large amounts of alcohol who also had low vitamin B6 consumption were at even higher risk of developing this type of cancer.


### Dr Shaun Holt:

The third most common cancer in Western countries affects the bowel, and it usually arises from mushroom-like growths called polyps. This huge study found this cancer was more common in people who had low levels of vitamin B6. Levels of this vitamin tend to be lower in people who drink excess alcohol, and in this research, it was found that women who drank a lot of alcohol did in fact have a higher risk for this cancer.

<http://www.gastrojournal.org>



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



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1 ISRCTN06161544 'HALT' is an open, multi-centre, randomised controlled clinical trial, assessing the effectiveness of UMF® Manuka Honey in healing patients with mixed venous leg ulcers. (Manuka Honey used as an adjuvant to compression therapy, in comparison to 'usual care').

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## Pine bark extract improves blood flow

### The facts:

- 113 people, including healthy people, athletes, people with leg vein conditions, diabetics and people with a walking impediment, took part in a clinical study to investigate whether Pycnogenol (pine bark extract) helps to reduce cramps and muscle pain.
- Pycnogenol (4x50mg capsules per day) was taken for 4 weeks
- The number of muscle cramps and amount of pain was lower after taking Pycnogenol for all types of people included in the study.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Most people have experienced cramps – these are painful contractions of muscles, usually due to either cold or over-exercise. One of the causes of cramps is a lack of oxygen getting to the muscles and this is usually caused by poor circulation. Older people often get painful cramps at night, and the pain in the muscles can last for quite a while after the cramp pain has gone. This study, which was published in a journal about blood flow, suggest that if you have cramps of poor blood circulation, then pine bark extract may well improve the blood flow and help the symptoms.

<http://ang.sagepub.com>

## Minerals help protect against cancer

### The facts:

- Over 4000 middle aged men in France were studied over an 18 year period to see how blood levels of copper, zinc and magnesium affect the risk of developing cancer or cardiovascular disease.
- High blood levels of copper markedly increased the risk of death by any cause, and the risk of death as a result of cancer or cardiovascular disease. When low zinc levels were also seen this increased the risk of death even further.
- High magnesium levels reduced the risk of death by cancer or cardiovascular disease and when combined with low zinc levels this reduction was more noticeable.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

This was an enormous study in an excellent journal, and so its findings are important. Although the mechanism of action was not examined in this study, the message was clear: a magnesium supplement reduced the risk of death or cancer in middle aged men. Many supplements are available and so if you are going to take a supplement, you may want to either take magnesium or a product that contains several supplements including magnesium.

<http://www.epidem.com>

## Acupuncture for fibromyalgia symptoms

### The facts:

- Fibromyalgia is a condition that may result in continuous muscle pain, fatigue, depression and sleep disturbance. It's cause is not fully understood.
- A clinical study was performed in 50 patients to investigate whether acupuncture was useful in the treatment of fibromyalgia.
- Acupuncture had a beneficial effect in patients with fatigue and anxiety being most noticeably improved.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Fibromyalgia affects around 5% of people – it is much more common in females and those who are between 20 and 50 years old. There are many unpleasant symptoms, the most common being constant pain in the muscles, leading to problem with sleep and problems with mood and thinking. Drugs that are used to help the symptoms mostly have side effects that can be almost as unpleasant as the disease and so alternative and natural treatments are being researched. This study, published in an excellent journal, suggests that acupuncture would be well worth trying.

<http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.com>

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## Calcium supplementation in older women

### The facts:

- 1460 women aged 70 and over participated in a study to look at the effect of calcium supplements in reducing bone fractures.
- The number of fractures over a 5 year period was lower amongst women who took calcium (600mg twice daily) than those who took a placebo (dummy drug). Bone density was also greater in the group of patients taking the calcium supplement.
- The study showed that a key problem with this type of treatment was that only about half of the women took 80% or more of their tablets.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

It is well known that older females are prone to osteoporosis and fractures, and that increased calcium intake is very useful. What this huge study tells us is that adherence to treatment (ie taking the supplement every day) is very poor. The key messages are that calcium supplements have a very positive effect on maintaining bone density and reducing the chance of fractures, but only if they are taken regularly. One tip to remember is to keep the supplements next to your toothbrush – assuming that you clean your teeth regularly!

<http://archinte.ama-assn.org>

### Disclaimer:

Natural Health Review features summarised interpretations of published studies and reflects the opinions of the writer rather than those of the research groups or scientific journals. Readers should consult a health professional before using any Natural Health products. Although Natural Health Review welcomes feedback, we cannot provide opinions or guidance on individual cases.

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## Vitamin D supplements for congestive heart failure

### The facts:

- Congestive heart failure is a condition where the heart doesn't pump effectively which can lead to a build up fluid in the lungs and swelling of the limbs.
- Approximately 100 patients with congestive heart failure took either vitamin D3 plus calcium or a placebo tablet plus calcium for 9 months.
- Several naturally occurring chemicals found in the blood, which are involved in inflammation, (swelling) were reduced following treatment with vitamin D3. The researchers suggest that vitamin D3 may be useful in the treatment of congestive heart failure.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Heart failure is one of those medical terms that most people are not clear on its meaning. Heart failure is when the heart does not properly fill with blood or pump it around the body; it should not be confused with cardiac arrest, which is when the heart stops. The condition often leads to swollen legs and difficulty breathing. Treatment is directed at the underlying cause and often involves giving diuretics or "water tablets" to reduce the amount of fluid in the legs and lungs. This study found that Vitamin D may be helpful if you have this condition.

[www.ajcn.org/](http://www.ajcn.org/)

## Yoga for rehabilitation in chronic pancreatitis

### The facts:

- Pancreatitis can be a very painful condition, which is especially uncomfortable after eating and may cause weight loss.
- A study was carried out in 30 patients with pancreatitis to see if yoga helped with their symptoms.
- After 3 months of a yoga programme patients reported less pain and anxiety, less need for pain relief, and improvements in their diet and weight gain.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

The pancreas is a gland located close to the stomach which produces enzymes that are used to digest food. Occasionally, the pancreas becomes inflamed which is known as pancreatitis. The most common cause is excess alcohol drinking. This was only a small study, and larger studies are needed before yoga can be strongly recommended, but if you have chronic pancreatitis it may be worth trying yoga to see if it can reduce your pain levels and weight loss.

<http://gut.bmjournals.com>



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