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Welcome to Natural Health Review Issue 16.

This month we have three exciting studies of omega-3, this time showing benefits in eczema, pregnancy blues and ADHD. Also, we have evidence of the anti-ageing effects of resveratrol (in mice at least), the beneficial effects of humble vitamin C on cholesterol levels, and the protective effects of beta-carotene against sunburn.

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

Kind Regards,

Dr Shaun Holt

shaun@naturalhealthreview.org

Green tea extract shows promise for sleep-disordered breathing

The facts:

- Green tea extract might have protective effects on the brain in people with sleep-disordered breathing, according to the results of a study in rats.
- The intermittent hypoxia (lack of oxygen) that occurs in sleep-disordered breathing can lead to impaired brain function.
- Rats fed catechin polyphenols extracted from green tea showed less cognitive impairment after long term intermittent hypoxia during sleep than untreated rats.



Dr Shaun Holt:

Sleep apnoea is a common condition where people miss breaths in their sleep, with pauses of at least 10 seconds between breaths. This causes a high degree of sleep disturbance and leaves the person extremely tired during the day. The most common treatment involves the use of a continuous positive air pressure (CPAP) device, which uses pressurised air to keep the breathing passages open. This animal study found benefits from green tea extracts in animals with laboratory-induced breathing problems, meaning that trials of green tea extracts for sleep apnoea are warranted.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1164/rccm.200701-110OC>

When it's winter outside Prepare yourself inside.



Vitamins are supplementary to and not a replacement for a balanced diet. Always read the label and use only as directed.

Your immune system is working 24/7 to protect you, but as winter sets in, it can do with some support. There are a number of vitamins, minerals and herbs that can help. Taken ahead of time and combined with a healthy diet, exercise and sleep, they're your best defense against winter.

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Beta-carotene effective as sunburn protector

The facts:

- Dietary supplementation with beta-carotene appears to provide a degree of sun protection, according to the pooled results of seven studies.
- In the studies, the protective effects of beta-carotene increased as the duration of supplementation increased.
- Nutritional protection against sun-induced skin damage is increasingly being recommended to the general public.



Dr Shaun Holt:

Often the best way to see if a treatment works is to gather up all the studies that have assessed it and add the results – a meta-analysis. This meta-analysis found a definite beneficial effect from beta-carotene in protecting against sunburn and of particular interest was the finding that the longer the beta-carotene is taken for, the greater the protection, with at least 10 weeks of supplementation needed for an effect. Beta-carotene is a highly coloured precursor of vitamin A.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-1097.2007.00253.x>

Low-dose resveratrol may slow ageing: for mice at least

The facts:

- Low doses of resveratrol reduced the effects of ageing on cardiac and skeletal muscle in mice.
- The anti-ageing effects of resveratrol were similar to those of a calorie-restricted diet.
- The doses used in this study can be readily achieved in humans.

Dr Shaun Holt:

There is huge excitement about resveratrol as animal data from studies such as this one suggests that it can extend lifespan by inhibiting certain genes. We only feature animal studies when they are particularly exciting, as the results have yet to be demonstrated in humans, but this compound is certainly exciting. Resveratrol is made by several plants and can be made synthetically and I for one can hardly wait to see the results of good studies undertaken in humans.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0002264>

The next best thing to a cure for the common cold

The facts:

- Zinc lozenges reduced the duration and severity of cold symptoms compared with placebo in a well-controlled study of 50 volunteers.
- Zinc or placebo lozenges were sucked every two to three hours (while awake) for five days.
- Compared with placebo, zinc lozenges reduced the overall duration of illness, cough and nasal discharge, as well as the severity of symptoms.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Imagine if your cold only lasted for four days rather than a whole week and if you only coughed for two days rather than five days? These were the amazing results from a moderate-sized study looking at the effects of zinc lozenges. Previous studies have shown mixed results, but this was a placebo-controlled randomised study with both clinically and statistically significant results. I know what I'll be taking when I next get a cold!



<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/528803>



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

Natural Solutions for Joint Mobility



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Jointex Glucosamine & Omega with Chondroitin

A unique high potency formulation combining Omega 3 with Glucosamine and Chondroitin, to help with joint mobility and keep joints supple and flexible. Omega 3 provides essential fatty acids to help keep joints supple.

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Available from selected pharmacies, health food stores and supermarkets.

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Natural relief for a common skin condition



The facts:

- A well-controlled pilot study has shown that dietary supplementation with omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) may reduce symptoms of atopic eczema.
- 53 patients received either docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) 5.4g or placebo daily for eight weeks and were examined for changes in their eczema.
- Compared with controls, patients who received DHA had significant clinical improvements in eczema symptoms that were accompanied by increases in plasma omega-3 PUFA levels.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Is there nothing that omega-3 cannot fix?! This well designed study showed that omega-3 improved the symptoms of allergic eczema by around 25%. Although I do not agree with the researchers that low omega-3 intake in the diet may be responsible for the increase in the prevalence in allergic eczema that we are seeing, these results are strong enough to warrant trying omega-3 if you or your child have eczema...if you are not already taking it!

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1365-2133.2007.08430.x>

Meta-analysis boosts vitamin C's heart benefits

The facts:

- Vitamin C can significantly reduce harmful blood fats in patients with high cholesterol levels, according to a pooled analysis of 13 randomised trials.
- To achieve significant reductions in LDL and triglyceride levels, patients took at least 500mg of vitamin C daily for a minimum of four weeks.
- Vitamin C supplementation had only slightly beneficial effects on HDL cholesterol levels.



Dr Shaun Holt:

Did you know that vitamin C could lower your cholesterol?! This meta-analysis of 13 clinical trials found that at least ½ a gram a day for at least four weeks was needed to reduce serum LDL cholesterol and serum triglyceride levels. Citrus fruits have around 50mg of vitamin C per 100g and the chances of side effects from taking too much vitamin C are very low.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jcme.2008.01.002>

“Good” bacteria may ease hay fever symptoms

The facts:

- Probiotics alter the immune response and might reduce symptom severity in people with hay fever.
- 20 patients with seasonal hay fever received a milk drink with or without *Lactobacillus casei* Shirota (LcS) daily for five months.
- Patients treated with probiotics showed changes in antigen-induced production of cytokines whereas untreated patients did not.



Dr Shaun Holt:

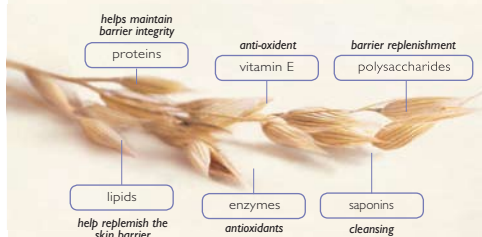
This was only a small study, but it did find that probiotics were able to lower the blood levels of various markers of the immune system's response to inhaled grass pollens. Larger studies are needed, and studies that look at the effect on symptoms, not just blood samples. The prevalence of hay fever is increasing in westernized countries, with pollens from trees, plants and weeds making life miserable for sufferers in the hay fever season.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2222.2008.03025.x>

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Omega-3s help beat pregnancy blues

The facts:

- Treatment with omega-3 PUFAs (3.4 g/day) reduced symptoms of depression during pregnancy without causing any adverse effects.
- Pregnant women who took omega-3 had less depression and higher response and remission rates compared with placebo when given for eight weeks.
- Physiological levels of omega-3 drop during pregnancy because of the higher demand of fetal development and can lead to depression.

Dr Shaun Holt:

We know that omega-3 fatty acids are useful in treating depression, and so in theory they may benefit the depression that commonly occurs after childbirth, especially as new mothers have low levels of omega-3 fatty acids as they pass them on to the baby in the womb. This placebo-controlled study found that it did work, and the researchers have rightly called for larger studies, both to confirm the findings and make sure that there are no side effects for either the mother or baby.

<http://www.psychiatrist.com/abstracts/200804/040817.htm>



Fatty acid status in adolescents with ADHD

The facts:

- Adolescents with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) metabolise omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids differently from those without ADHD.
- As a result, adolescents have lower circulating levels of DHA and total omega-3 fatty acids, and these correlate with higher ADHD scores.
- The abnormal essential fatty acid profiles seen in adolescents with ADHD are similar to those seen in younger children with ADHD, and are not directly related to dietary intake.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This study indirectly adds strength to the possibility of omega-3 fatty acids supplements being a possible treatment for ADHD, as fatty acids appear to be metabolised differently in children with ADHD. Usually I like to feature studies that show more definitely that a treatment works, but given the desperation of many parents of children with ADHD, I think we should keep a close eye on developments. A study has shown that only 5% of those with ADHD will get a college degree compared to 27% of the general population.

<http://www.nutritionj.com/content/7/1/8>

Natural treatments for vitiligo

The facts:

- Vitiligo is a hypopigmentation disorder that affects as many as 4% of the world's population.
- Several studies have shown promising results for L-phenylalanine (used with phototherapy) and oral Ginkgo biloba in patients with vitiligo.
- In general, however, studies of natural health products for the treatment of vitiligo have been poorly designed and significantly flawed.



Dr Shaun Holt:

The lack of pigmentation that occurs in parts of the body due to vitiligo is not dangerous to the person's health, but it is disfiguring and a source of embarrassment and even causes psychiatric problems for people with this condition. Can any natural treatments help? Two potential natural therapies were identified, L-phenylalanine and Ginkgo biloba, but bigger and better studies are needed. Traditional treatments are not very effective and can have side effects and so the sooner these studies are carried out the better.

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-5945/8/2/abstract>

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