











Natural Health Review

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Welcome to Natural Health Review eight. It was great to meet many of you at the Natural Health Products Summit last month.

This month we feature a wide variety of research studies including interesting results on the effects of folic acid in the older generation and the use of probiotics for colic in babies and adult digestion.

As of May this year Natural Health Review will be distributed bi-monthly and this will be the last monthly issue. I hope you enjoy the latest edition.

Kind Regards,

Dr Shaun Holt

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Fish intake linked to higher IQ in offspring

The facts:

- Seafood is a major source of omega-3 fatty acids (vital for neural development) but pregnant women in the US are advised to limit its consumption because of the risk of harm from trace contaminants.
- A questionnaire study of 11 875 pregnant women showed that maternal seafood consumption >340g per week was beneficial to child development.
- Advice to limit seafood intake during pregnancy could actually be detrimental to the child.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Research published in *The Lancet* is usually of the highest quality and importance, and this study is no different. It is well known that fatty acids are needed for healthy brain development and so this huge questionnaire study looked at maternal fish intake during pregnancy and health outcomes for the child, including intelligence, social skills and communication. 340 g of seafood consumption per week was associated with better outcomes for the children. Those worried about the risks from trace contaminants found in fish could consider taking a supplement instead.

<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673607602773/abstract>

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Folic acid and cognitive function in older adults

The facts:

- Low blood folate levels are associated with poor cognitive performance in the general population.
- A study of 818 older patients who took 800mcg folic acid or placebo daily for 3 years showed that folic acid significantly improved memory, information processing speed and sensorimotor speed.
- Long term supplementation with folic acid significantly improved aspects of cognition that may decline with age.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Of all the studies that we have reviewed in Natural Health Review, this may be the most important. "Cognition" refers to reasoning, perception, learning an intelligence and these tend to decline naturally with increasing age. However, people who took 800 µg daily oral folic acid for 3 years had improved results in tests of cognition, when compared to those who took a placebo. We generally live a lot longer than we did 100-200 years ago, and folic acid supplements may mean that you can retain your mental agility in old age.

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

Selenium Supplementation for HIV carriers

The facts:

- 262 men and women took HIV-1 received high selenium yeast supplementation (200 mcg/day) for 9 months in addition to an antiretroviral regimen.
- Supplementation led to an increase in serum selenium levels which were in turn associated with a reduction in viral load and an improvement in CD4 counts.
- Selenium was seen to be a useful addition to treatment in HIV patients.

Dr Shaun Holt:

There were a number of interesting findings from this study. Compliance with study medication was only 73%, and this may be related to the large number of medications that patients with HIV usually have to take. Although it may seem obvious, it was important to see that selenium levels rose in those who took the selenium. It could have been that the selenium supplement was excreted straight away and it may not necessarily have increased blood levels. And so, despite the many medications people already take, it would be worth taking selenium as an additional safe and effective addition to the treatment regime.

<http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/167/2/148>

Fibre lowers breast cancer risk

The facts:

- The association between dietary fibre intake and breast cancer risk is not clearly understood.
- The UK Women's Cohort Study found that dietary fibre (particularly cereals) had a protective effect against breast cancer risk in pre-menopausal women
- No such effect was observed in post- menopausal women.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Dietary fibres are those parts of plant foods that are not digested, such as non-starch polysaccharides and cellulose. We know all about the benefits of high-fibre diets for bowel health, but some previous studies have also suggested a protective effect against certain cancers. This study found, in pre-menopausal women, a dose-response relationship between dietary fibre and breast cancer. In other words, the more fibre there was in the diet, the less chance of this common cancer.

<http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/dyl295v1>

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Calcium and vitamin D may cut heart risk

The facts:

- 63 overweight or obese women with poor calcium intake were given calcium + vitamin D supplementation or placebo during a 15-week weight loss programme.
- Women who received calcium showed beneficial changes in total, LDL and HDL cholesterol levels.
- These improvements were independent of changes in waist measurements.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This was a small study, so the results should be interpreted with caution. However, the findings were interesting: dieting women with low calcium intake had better improvements in HDL cholesterol levels and other cholesterols and glucose tolerance when they took calcium and Vitamin D supplements. I'm not sure what the mechanism of this would be, but given the benefits of these supplements in women anyway with respect to bone health, these findings are a nice bonus!

<http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/85/1/54>



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

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Probiotics help maintain digestive health during chronic stress

The facts:

- Chronic psychological stress can cause intestinal abnormalities.
- A study in rats found that the use of probiotics (Lactobacillus strains) helped protect against stress-induced changes in the ileum and colon.
- Studies are necessary to determine if probiotics have similar benefits in the intestinal tract of humans.

Dr Shaun Holt:

What does the term "probiotic" mean exactly?

The term is used to describe dietary supplements that contain potentially beneficial micro-organisms. Interest has been huge since a study published in The Lancet a few years ago showed that probiotics could potentially reduce the incidence of eczema. This study, which was conducted in rats, provides some preliminary evidence that probiotics can have beneficial effects locally in the bowel, by seemingly preventing abnormalities that are seen in the bowel due to chronic stress.

<http://gut.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/55/11/1553>



Vitamins benefit divers' health

The facts:

- Diving-induced negative changes in heart function have been reported recently.
- To assess the potential benefits of oral antioxidants, vitamin C (2g) and vitamin E (400 IU) were given to 7 divers before open sea dives to 30m.
- Antioxidants improved a few measures of cardiovascular function but most were unaffected.

Dr Shaun Holt:

There are many physiological changes that occur in the body when a person goes underwater diving. These include adverse effects on the heart, circulation

and lining of some blood vessels. As the beneficial effects of antioxidants are well known, the researchers looked at whether vitamins C and E were of benefit. It was a very small study, but beneficial effects were seen in the physiological markers after the vitamins were taken, when compared to the results obtained from the control dive.

<http://jp.physoc.org/cgi/content/abstract/578/3/859>

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

Research Review acknowledges the kind support of



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Probiotics—The Key to Calming Colic



The facts:

- 83 breastfed infants who had colic received either the probiotic *Lactobacillus reuteri* (108 live bacteria per day) or simethicone (60 mg/day) for 28 days.
- At the end of the study infants who received the probiotic had a median crying time of 51 min/day compared with 145 min/day for those taking simethicone.
- Improvements in colicky symptoms with *L. reuteri* were seen within 1 week compared with simethicone.

Dr Shaun Holt:

All new parents know that it would be great to have something, anything, that works well for colic in infants! A recent study in the main paediatrics journal reported a study where a probiotic was tested in

colicky infants, with the main outcome being crying duration. Those children who were given the probiotic *Lactobacillus reuteri* had a crying time of 51 minutes per day, as opposed to 145 minutes a day for those who did not receive it, after a month of treatment. This is an amazing result: well worth a try if your colicky baby is driving you to despair.

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/119/1/e124>

Vitamin D for prevention of Multiple Sclerosis

The facts:

- It is believed that vitamin D is a powerful immunomodulator that may reduce the risk of multiple sclerosis (MS).
- Analysis of 257 MS patients in the US army (each matched to 2 healthy controls) found that increasing levels of vitamin D were associated with a reduced risk of MS in White patients.
- The inverse association between vitamin D levels and MS risk was particularly strong before the age of 20 years.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Multiple Sclerosis is a disease where there are many scars on the fatty coatings of nerves, causing problems with the electrical conduction in the nerves. It is thought that the underlying cause is the bodies own immune system. In this study, blood samples from people with MS in the US Army were compared to similar people without the disease. It was found that high blood levels of vitamin D were associated with a decreased chance of developing MS. It is too early to say whether people should take vitamin D to prevent MS, but the results will provide researchers with useful clues for future research into MS prevention and treatment.

<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/296/23/2832>

Folic acid supplementation and hearing



The facts:

- Low folate levels have been associated with poor hearing.
- A well-controlled study in The Netherlands in 728 older men and women investigated the effects of folic acid supplementation (800 mcg/day) on hearing.
- After 3 years, the age-associated decline in hearing was slowed in patients receiving folic acid supplements.

Dr Shaun Holt:

“WHAT WAS THAT, DEAR?” could become a thing of the past due to the findings from this important research. This large study, conducted in Holland, found that taking folic acid supplements at a dose of 800 µg per day led to a slow-down in the natural decline in hearing that occurs when we get older. Importantly, this study was conducted in a country that does not have folate fortification of food, and so the participants had initial folate levels around half lower than those found in people in other countries. However, it is further evidence that you should make sure that you are getting enough folate.

<http://www.annals.org/cgi/content/abstract/146/1/1>

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