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Abbreviations used in this issue

ALTENS = acupuncture-like, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation



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Research Review

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Welcome to the latest issue of Natural Health Review.

Highlights include several studies demonstrating the benefits of complementary therapies in people with cancer, ranging from stress-relieving techniques for treatment apprehension, to ALTENS for radiation-induced dry mouth, and ginger for chemotherapy-associated nausea and vomiting. We also report 2 studies of zinc (the flavour of the month!) and my own research of topical kanuka honey for rosacea.

We hope you enjoy these and the other selected studies, and welcome your feedback.

Kind Regards,

Shaun

Prof Shaun Holt

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Stress-relieving techniques for people with cancer

The facts:

- This study assessed the value of rapid stress management techniques and complementary therapies in 19 patients with cancer who had previously had difficulties associated with treatment such as needle phobia, claustrophobia, and anticipatory nausea.
- Participants were typically taught two rapid stress management techniques to manage their fears; sometimes these were used after another brief complementary treatment such as massage, aromatherapy or reflexology.
- The stress management techniques and complementary therapies were reported to help patients achieve a calm state before and during procedures.



Prof Shaun Holt:

One of the symptoms of cancer that is not talked about often is stress – having a serious illness, symptoms such as pain, or side effects from treatments such as nausea, can all cause huge amounts of stress. Stress reduction support is often simply not considered as health professionals tend to focus on treating the underlying disease. There is even some data which suggests that high stress levels are associated with worse outcomes. This small study conducted in a famous UK cancer centre found that patients benefited in many ways when they were taught rapid stress management techniques.

[Abstract](#)



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ALTENS vs pilocarpine for radiation-induced xerostomia

The facts:

- Acupuncture-like, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (ALTENS) may be as effective as oral pilocarpine (the current drug of choice) in patients with radiation-induced dry mouth, also known as xerostomia.
- 146 cancer patients who had xerostomia after completing radiation therapy were randomised to receive ALTENS (two 20-minute sessions per week) or oral pilocarpine 5mg three times a day for 12 weeks.
- When assessed 9 months after starting treatment, radiation-induced xerostomia symptoms did not differ significantly between groups.

Prof Shaun Holt:

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) is a great example of a complementary therapy which has changed from being seen as bizarre, to becoming part of standard medical care for people experiencing certain types of pain. ALTENS is a similar therapy and this large study, which recruited nearly 150 participants, found that it was around as effective, and had fewer side effects, when compared to the drug pilocarpine in patients with xerostomia (dry mouth). This is a very common and troublesome side effect in people who are undergoing radiation therapy, particularly for cancers of the head and neck.

[Abstract](#)

Folic acid for primary prevention of stroke

The facts:

- This study evaluated the use of folic acid for stroke prevention in patients with high blood pressure.
- More than 20,000 adults in China with hypertension who had never had a stroke or heart attack were given the blood pressure-lowering drug enalapril 10mg with folic acid 0.8mg in a single pill, or enalapril 10mg alone and were followed-up for almost 5 years.
- Participants who took folic acid along with enalapril were less likely to have had a stroke during the trial than those who took enalapril alone.
- The benefits of folic acid were greatest in people who had low folate levels at the start of the study.



Prof Shaun Holt:

Confusingly, folic acid is known by several other names including folate and vitamin B9. Whatever you call it, this B vitamin is well worth knowing about. It is found naturally in many foods, especially green leafy vegetables, beans, and citrus fruits and there has been heated debate in New Zealand and other countries as to whether it should be added to bread. This massive study of more than 20,000 adults in China with high blood pressure found that people who took folic acid supplements along with the blood-pressure lowering medicine enalapril were less likely to have had a stroke than those who took enalapril alone.

[Abstract](#)

High-dose zinc lozenges and the common cold



The facts:

- This study pooled the results from 3 randomised trials to evaluate whether zinc acetate lozenges (giving zinc doses of 80–92 mg/day) have different effects on various common cold symptoms.
- Zinc lozenges shortened the duration of nasal discharge by 34%, nasal congestion by 37%, sneezing by 22%, scratchy throat by 33%, sore throat by 18%, hoarseness by 43%, and cough by 46%. The duration of muscle ache was halved but the duration of headache was not affected.
- Zinc lozenges may be a useful treatment for the common cold if started within 24 hours of symptom onset.

Prof Shaun Holt:

Adults have an average of 2–3 colds each year, and children have an average of 5–7 each year. Whilst we are a long way off having a cure for the common cold, some supplements can help. Vitamin C is well known as a supplement to prevent and treat colds, but most people do not realize that zinc is actually far more effective. This study found that zinc lozenges reduced the duration of various symptoms of the common cold, such as cough and muscle ache, by 18–45%. In other words, the cold symptoms will disappear 1–2 days earlier, which makes taking the supplements very worthwhile.

[Abstract](#)



Zinc deficiency enhances inflammatory response

The facts:

- This study set out to understand the relationship between zinc deficiency and inflammation.
- Various experiments found that zinc deficiency induced an increase in the inflammatory response in cells. The researchers also found that older mice have lower zinc levels than younger mice.
- Together, the results suggest a potential link between zinc deficiency and increased inflammation that can occur with age.

Prof Shaun Holt:

Zinc is the flavour of the month in this issue (and actually zinc supplements can have quite a strong metallic taste!). A lot of people take zinc supplements to boost their immune systems and this animal study provides support for this. Basically, the study showed that lowering zinc levels resulted in immune system cells not working as well as they could. As many people do not consume enough zinc in their diet, one of the researchers, Professor Emily Ho, said "... we think zinc deficiency is probably a bigger problem than most people realize ... preventing that deficiency is important".

[Abstract](#)

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Probiotics may reduce sadness

The facts:

- This study investigated the effects of multispecies probiotics on cognitive responses to sad mood.
- 40 healthy individuals were asked to take a sachet containing placebo or probiotic powder each day for 4 weeks. Before and after treatment they completed a questionnaire that assessed their sensitivity (cognitive reactivity) to sad mood.
- Compared to subjects who received the placebo intervention, those who took the multispecies probiotics had fewer negative thoughts associated with sad mood.



Prof Shaun Holt:

There is more and more evidence that probiotic supplements can prevent and treat many diseases and improve health. One of the latest findings is that they may even help to prevent or treat depression. This study adds weight to this theory, as it found that the intake of probiotics may help reduce negative thoughts associated with sad mood. In particular, they helped to reduce rumination, which is defined as "when a person has recurrent thoughts about possible causes and consequences of one's distress".

[Abstract](#)

Topical kanuka honey improves rosacea

The facts:

- This study assessed the effects of a medical-grade kanuka honey formulation (Honevo®) in patients with rosacea.
- 137 adults with rosacea were randomised to apply the honey formulation or cetomacrogol (control) twice daily for 30–60 minutes per application, for eight weeks.
- 65% of patients who used the honey formulation showed an improvement in their rosacea, 34% had a large improvement and 13% had complete disappearance of the disease; improvements were seen within 2 weeks.

Prof Shaun Holt:

I try not to talk about my own research, but this is definitely worthy of inclusion. This large study found that Honevo®, a medical-grade kanuka honey formulation, is an effective and safe treatment for rosacea. 5–10% of adults suffer from rosacea (facial flushing and/or pustules) which can reduce a person's quality of life. New evidence suggests that the demodex mite is a contributing factor in many cases, and this explains why the honey formulation, which is applied as a mask twice a day and then easily washes off, was so effective.

[Abstract](#)

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Ginger reduces chemotherapy-associated nausea and vomiting



The facts:

- 57 children with bone cancer who were undergoing chemotherapy and taking prescribed anti-emetics (ondansetron and dexamethasone) were given additional ginger root powder capsules or placebo during their 3-day chemotherapy cycle to assess the effects of ginger on chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting.
- The children kept a diary during chemotherapy and for the following week to record the severity of their nausea and vomiting.
- Compared with placebo, ginger powder capsules significantly reduced the incidence of severe nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy.

Prof Shaun Holt:

The nausea and vomiting that inevitably occurs as a result of chemotherapy is a difficult problem to manage. In this study of children with bone cancer who were undergoing chemotherapy and already taking anti-nausea and anti-vomiting drugs the researchers found a significant benefit of ginger powder compared to placebo, and with no side effects. These effects of ginger are well known but the fact that it is still effective in addition to the best medications we have is remarkable. Dose is important: study participants were given 1,000mg of ginger powder per day if they weighed 20–40kg and 2,000mg per day if they weighed 41–60kg.

[Abstract](#)

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Roseroot vs sertraline for depression

The facts:

- The relative efficacy of the European folk medicine roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*) was compared with that of sertraline in 57 patients with mild to moderate major depressive disorder.
- After 12 weeks' treatment, patients who took sertraline were 1.9 times more likely than those taking placebo to report an improvement in their depressive symptoms, while those who took roseroot were 1.4 times more likely to report the same.
- Roseroot was better tolerated than sertraline, with adverse events reported by 30% and 63% of patients in the respective groups.

Prof Shaun Holt:

We all know about how effective St John's Wort is as a treatment for depression, and this study found that the European folk medicine roseroot may also be effective. Also known as *Rhodiola rosea*, it grows in cold regions of the world, including much of the Arctic. In the study, those who took the common antidepressant medication sertraline were 1.9 times more likely than those taking a placebo to report their depressive symptoms had improved, and those who took roseroot were 1.4 times more likely. More studies are needed, but as roseroot almost certainly has fewer side effects than the prescription drug, it may be a better choice for some people.

[Abstract](#)

Dietary fibre and type 2 diabetes

The facts:

- This report of a large European study (EPIC-InterAct Study) evaluated the association between intake of dietary fibre and type 2 diabetes.
- The authors pooled their findings with those from 18 other independent studies, to include a total of over 41,000 patients with type 2 diabetes.
- The risk of diabetes was found to decrease by 9% for each 10 g/day increase in total fibre intake, and by 25% for each 10 g/day increase in cereal fibre intake.

Prof Shaun Holt:

Most people do not have the recommended 20–35 grams of fibre daily. One of the consequences of not having enough dietary fibre is an increased risk of developing type 2 (adult-onset) diabetes and this study found that a total fibre intake of more than 26g per day led to an 18% lower risk of developing diabetes compared to eating less than 19g a day. But what is the mechanism? Experts believe dietary fibre may help people maintain a healthy weight, which in turn reduces the chances of developing type 2 diabetes.

[Abstract](#)

