










Natural Health Review

Proven Natural Health

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In this issue:

-  *Cranberry juice and urinary infections*
-  *Pine bark for migraine*
-  *Fish oils for pain relief*
-  *Hawthorn and blood pressure*
-  *Drinking milk during pregnancy*
-  *Hot and cold treatments for back pain*
-  *Cranberries and dental decay*
-  *Cereal fibre for diabetes*
-  *Pomegranate juice for prostate cancer*



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

Welcome to second edition of Natural Health Review, the independent New Zealand natural health publication focusing on well researched facts.

There's a vast range of natural health products on the market. Some have good quality research to show they're effective, others have yet to prove their worth - and there is often no way for most of us to tell the difference when making a choice. Natural Health Review helps to shed some light on which products really can make a difference.

This month we explore some new beneficial effects of fish oil, a product which is building an excellent bank of supportive evidence for a variety of ailments. Also, some exciting developments highlighted in the use of hawthorn with type 2 diabetes sufferers.

I hope you enjoy this issue and would be delighted to receive your feedback

Kind regards,

Dr Shaun Holt

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Cranberry juice prevents urinary tract infections

The facts:

- 10 men and 10 women were asked to drink either cranberry juice (made with 100% cranberry juice) or a placebo (fake cranberry juice) and provide a urine sample
- In the urine from people who had consumed cranberry juice bacteria was prevented from sticking to bladder cells.
- People who drank more cranberry juice had a higher level of protection against the bacteria.



Dr Shaun Holt: Cranberries are related to bilberries, blueberries, and huckleberries and people have eaten them for centuries, particularly people in Arctic regions. Cranberry juice has a long history in the prevention and treatment of urinary tract infections.

This study in 20 healthy people has proved scientifically that cranberry juice can reduce urine infection.

A brief word of caution for people using blood thinning medicines - the Committee on Safety of Medicines, the UK agency dealing with drug safety, has advised patients taking Warfarin not to drink cranberry juice after adverse effects were reported.

www.springerlink.com/

Pine bark combination for migraine

The facts:

- Researchers tested a combination of pine bark extract and antioxidant vitamins in people who did not respond to other migraine treatments
- The number and severity of migraine attacks was reduced in people taking the herbal/vitamin product
- This was a small study and further research is needed

Dr Shaun Holt: Migraine is a relatively common condition in western societies that causes a number of symptoms including severe headache, nausea and visual disturbance.

A migraine attack may last for several hours or even days and can affect all aspects of a person's life. There are several different drug therapies available but not all are effective in all patients.

This was a small scale study. However, the results look promising and it will be interesting to see the outcome of future research with larger numbers of patients.

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/>

Fish oils for pain relief

The facts:

- 250 patients took a supplement containing omega-3 EFAs (a fish oil preparation) for back or neck pain.
- Around 60% of patients (who responded to a questionnaire) said their pain had decreased, and over 80% said they would continue with the supplement.
- Fish oil appears to be a safe alternative to traditional painkillers, although further work is needed

Dr Shaun Holt: Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) drugs such as aspirin and ibuprofen are routinely used to treat back and neck pain but can cause unwanted side effects.

These results show signs that fish oil supplements may be of benefit as a pain reliever.

Before we rush out to buy some, we do need more research of this potential benefit - only half the patients who took part in the study responded to the questionnaire and it is impossible to tell what the remaining patients thought of the treatment.

www.sciencedirect.com/science

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Hot and cold treatments for back pain

The facts:

- This study looked at whether superficial heat and cold therapy helped low-back pain in adults
- The research results suggest that heat therapy may provide some level of relief
- The evidence was not clear enough to confirm whether 'cold' treatment relieves back pain

Dr Shaun Holt: Low back pain causes misery for thousands of people at some time in their lives. The pain can be felt as a dull ache, a sharp or piercing pain or burning sensation.

This research found the use of a heat wrap or heated blanket reduced back pain to some degree and that exercise, when used with a heat wrap, helped to reduce symptoms.

More good research is needed but people with low back pain should consider heat treatments as a simple way to relieve symptoms without the need for painkiller medications.

www.cmaj.ca/

Drinking milk during pregnancy

The facts:

- Not enough milk consumption during pregnancy can lead to smaller babies
- Women who generally drank less than 250ml milk per day gave birth to babies who weighed less than those born to mothers who drank more milk.
- Vitamin D (present in milk) was directly linked to the babies' birth weight

Dr Shaun Holt: Pregnancy is a unique time in every mother's life when health worries are at their peak. Mums-to-be are barraged with information about what they should and shouldn't do during pregnancy, and some of the information can be confusing and conflicting.

It is generally accepted that low birth weight babies are at a higher risk of becoming ill and frequently don't thrive as well as babies of normal birth weight. The study indicates drinking milk every day during pregnancy may help improve birth weight.

The study does not however pinpoint how much milk would be most helpful and like most supplements, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. It is worth discussing this with your healthcare professional as part of a wider conversation about maintaining a healthy diet during pregnancy.

<http://www.liebertonline.com/>

Hawthorn to lower blood pressure

The facts:

- Many people with diabetes also have high blood pressure
- This study looked at whether 1200 mg per day of Hawthorn plant extract affected blood pressure in people with diabetes
- Results from this British clinical trial showed Hawthorn did lower blood pressure for these people

Dr Shaun Holt: Hypertension (high blood pressure) is a condition affecting a vast number of people (it is very common in people with type 2 diabetes) and if untreated can result in an increased risk of heart disease, kidney disease and stroke.

In this British study hawthorn extract was found to reduce blood pressure in patients who took the product for 4 months compared to those who took a placebo (dummy drug).

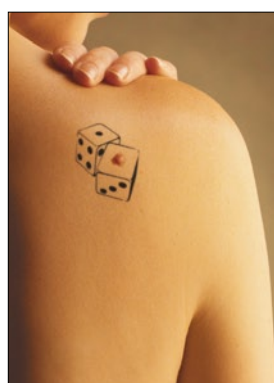
This well-controlled study was performed in nearly 80 patients and shows that hawthorn extract may well be a useful treatment for hypertension.

<http://rcgp.publisher.ingentaconnect.com/>

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Cereal fibre for diabetes

The facts:

- Patients were asked to consume either standard white bread or white bread with added cereal fibre
- Those who had eaten white bread with added cereal fibre had a higher sensitivity to insulin than those who had eaten the standard bread.
- This study shows how fibre can reduce the risk of developing diabetes

Dr Shaun Holt: One of the main issues for sufferers of type 2 diabetes is a lack of sensitivity to insulin. This means the patient may produce insulin but their body is unable to use it effectively. As a result people often have to resort to taking insulin injections or medications to control their insulin levels and regulate their blood glucose levels.



Cereal fibre is widely advocated as being a healthy addition to our diets but this important study shows that it may help to reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

<http://care.diabetesjournals.org/>

Pomegranate juice for prostate cancer

The facts:

- Pomegranate juice is a rich source of anti-oxidant phytochemicals, which are thought to be of benefit in preventing cancer.
- Men who had recently been treated for prostate cancer were asked to drink pomegranate juice on a daily basis
- The rise in PSA (prostate-specific antigen) levels slowed down and some of the cancer cells died.

Dr Shaun Holt: Pomegranate juice is a popular drink in the Middle East, and is also used in Iranian and Indian cuisine. Grenadine syrup is thickened and sweetened pomegranate juice and is used in cocktail mixing.

Men with prostate cancer often have higher levels of a chemical called prostate-specific antigen (PSA) in their blood. If this result is repeated in larger studies then this could be a very exciting development in the treatment of this type of cancer.

<http://clincancerres.aacrjournals.org/>

Cranberries may fight cavities

The facts:

- Dental decay is caused largely by the bacterium *Streptococcus mutans*
- In laboratory tests cranberry extract stopped this bacterium from working normally
- Cranberry extract may be useful in the fight against tooth decay although further tests in people are needed

Dr Shaun Holt: The name cranberry probably derives from their being a favourite food of cranes (long-legged and long-necked birds).

These results were made public at a dental conference in Australia last month. These are early lab based tests and it will be interesting to see if the same results occur when more studies are carried out. Perhaps we will see more cranberry flavoured toothpaste making an appearance!

www.webmd.com/

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