






In this issue:

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Welcome to Natural Health Review Issue 26.

We have a great selection of studies this month, with several of particular interest to women. Research shows that women undergoing infertility treatment might want to try a Mediterranean diet to improve their chances of pregnancy, women with period pain might want to try acupuncture, and those with issues of anger or depression might want to consider taking zinc supplements. I hope you enjoy the selection this month, and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Kind Regards,

Dr Shaun Holt

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Mediterranean diet increases chances of pregnancy after infertility treatment

The facts:

- The diets of 161 women undergoing IVF treatment were evaluated to see if their dietary habits affected their chances of becoming pregnant.
- Two main dietary patterns were observed: a healthy diet characterised by high intakes of fruit, vegetables, fish, and wholegrains, and a Mediterranean diet characterised by high intake of vegetable oils, vegetables, fish and beans.
- Women who most closely adhered to a Mediterranean diet had a 40% greater chance of pregnancy after infertility treatment than those who ate the least Mediterranean-like diet.



Dr Shaun Holt:

In vitro fertilisation is a costly and emotionally stressful experience – anything that increases the chances of a successful pregnancy would be of huge benefit for thousands of women and couples. This study from the Netherlands found that adhering to a Mediterranean diet could increase the chances of success by 40%. The authors stress that this was an observational study and cause-and-effect have not been proved. But given that it is a very healthy diet anyway, it is strongly recommended for women undergoing IVF and the studies that prove that it works are eagerly awaited.

[http://www.fertstert.org/article/S0015-0282\(09\)04338-6/abstract](http://www.fertstert.org/article/S0015-0282(09)04338-6/abstract)



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Zinc may reduce anger and depression in young women

The facts:

- 30 young women were given either a multivitamin or a multivitamin plus zinc (7mg) daily for 10 weeks.
- Women who took multivitamins plus zinc showed reductions in anger and depression over the course of the study, whereas women who took only the multivitamin did not.
- Zinc supplementation may therefore help reduce anger and depression in young women.

Dr Shaun Holt:

We know that lithium, a metal, is very effective at altering mood and is one of the most common drugs used to treat bipolar disease. Could another metal, zinc, also be effective? We know that zinc deficiency affects 30 per cent of the world's population, and also that mood swings are common symptoms of mild zinc deficiency. This small study found that zinc did in fact reduce depression symptoms and symptoms of excess anger. If the results are confirmed in bigger studies, we will potentially have a new, simple, safe treatment for a very common condition.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/ejcn.2009.158>

Lutein plus vitamin A may slow mid-peripheral vision loss

The facts:

- 225 nonsmokers with an inherited eye disease were given vitamin A (15,000 IU daily) on its own or in combination with lutein (12mg daily) for 4 years.
- The addition of lutein had no significant effect on overall vision loss associated with the disease, but slowed the rate of decline of mid-peripheral vision.
- The investigators noted that long term follow-up for at least 10 years is needed to confirm the benefits of lutein plus vitamin A on vision loss.



Dr Shaun Holt:

Retinitis pigmentosa is a group of inherited eye diseases that lead to degeneration of photoreceptor cells in the retina, causing a progressive loss of vision. It affects around one in 4,000 people around the world, which adds up to hundreds of thousands. This high-quality, large, controlled study found that a daily supplement of lutein in combination with vitamin A slowed the vision loss associated with retinitis pigmentosa. This study adds weight to the growing evidence that lutein can keep eyes healthy.

<http://archophth.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/128/4/403>

Diet might protect against Alzheimer disease



The facts:

- 2148 elderly men and women without dementia provided dietary information and were evaluated annually to assess the association between food and Alzheimer disease risk.
- 253 people developed Alzheimer disease over a follow-up period of nearly 4 years.
- Those people who ate more salad dressing, nuts, fish, poultry and certain fruits and vegetables, and who ate lower amounts of high-fat dairy products, red meats, organ meats and butter were less likely to develop Alzheimer disease.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This study provides some of the strongest evidence yet that a person's diet has a large influence on whether or not they develop Alzheimer disease. Over 2,000 people were followed for around 4 years and one dietary pattern was significantly associated with a reduced risk of Alzheimer disease: a diet with high intakes of salad dressing, nuts, fish, tomatoes, poultry, fruits and cruciferous and dark and green leafy vegetables and low intakes of high-fat dairy, red meat, organ meat and butter.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/app.30956>

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Slushies keep athletes cool, for a while at least

The facts:

- This NZ study investigated the effect of an ice slurry drink on body temperature responses and running time in a hot environment.
- Young men who drank a syrup-flavoured slushie just before running on a treadmill in a hot room were able to continue for an average of 50 minutes before they had to stop, compared with an average 40 minutes running time after a cold water drink.
- Drinking a slushie may be an effective means of precooling in athletes competing in hot climates but the effect is short-lived and more suited to sports such as tennis and soccer rather than endurance races.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This small, quirky study has demonstrated a simple way to improve exercise performance on hot days ... drink an ice slurry, also known as a slushie, before exercising. Compared with cold water, ice slurry ingestion increased submaximal endurance running time in the heat from 41 to 50 minutes. Senior investigator Paul Laursen of the New Zealand Academy of Sport in Auckland knows what he is talking about when it comes to exercise ... he's been a competitor in 13 Ironman triathlons!

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1249/MSS.0b013e3181bf257a>



Independent
commentary by

Dr Shaun Holt,
BPharm (hons),
MBChB (hons)

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Vitamins could help nutrient-deficient mothers have healthier babies

The facts:

- 402 poorly nourished women from a socially deprived area in east London were given a multivitamin and mineral supplement (including iron and folic acid) or a placebo from their first trimester of pregnancy to see if it would have any effect on their health and the health of their babies.
- Women who took the supplement were found to have better nutrient status at 36 weeks than those who took placebo.
- Women taking the supplement were less likely to have a baby who was small-for-gestational age.

Dr Shaun Holt:

It makes sense that pregnant women should have a healthy diet and perhaps take a multivitamin supplement in order to ensure that they are taking in, and passing on, all the essential micronutrients. There is a school of thought that in developed countries, there is no need for pregnant women to take a supplement as diets in these countries are adequate, but one of the study authors says that the results "blows out of the water the idea that all women in the UK are adequately nourished". The trial of 400 women in east London, found the number of "small-for-gestational age" babies was reduced among those who took a multivitamin supplement compared with those given a placebo.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0007114510000747>

Pregnant women should take 4,000 IU vitamin D daily, say researchers

The facts:

- 494 pregnant women were given a daily dose of vitamin D (400, 2000 or 4000 IU) from 12-16 weeks' gestation until delivery to evaluate the effects of vitamin D during pregnancy.
- Women who took the highest vitamin D dosage had the lowest rates of preterm labour and preterm birth, and the lowest rates of infection.
- No adverse events related to vitamin D were reported for mothers or babies with any of the doses tested.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Sometimes new medical research findings can lead to doctors recommending the opposite of what they had previously recommended and this important study provides another example of this. In the 1950s and '60s, people were concerned that vitamin D could cause birth defects. However, more recent studies have shown that vitamin D deficiency during pregnancy is a serious public health issue and this study found that not only was taking vitamin D supplements during pregnancy safe for mother and baby, but also that it can prevent preterm labour/births and infections.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100501013417.htm>



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Low vitamin D linked to asthma severity in children

The facts:

- Serum levels of vitamin D were measured in 100 children with asthma to examine the link between vitamin D levels, asthma severity and treatment effectiveness.
- Low levels of vitamin D were associated with poorer lung function and greater corticosteroid use in children with asthma.
- Vitamin D supplementation might help reverse steroid resistance in asthmatic children and reduce the effective dose of steroids needed.

Dr Shaun Holt:

There is so much research on the benefits of taking vitamin D supplements at the moment that I may have to write another research review just on vitamin D! This study found that low levels of vitamin D are associated with lower lung function and increased medication use in children with asthma. The lead researcher said that there were two likely explanations for the study findings: "... it could be that lower vitamin D levels contribute to increasing asthma severity, which requires more corticosteroid therapy. Or, it may be that vitamin D directly affects steroid activity, and that low levels of vitamin D make the steroids less effective, thus requiring more medication for the same effect".

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaci.2010.03.008>

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Acupuncture helps period pain

The facts:

- 15 women who had suffered long term moderate to severe period pain that didn't respond well to NSAIDs were given weekly acupuncture treatments for 2 months.
- 13 of 15 women (65%) reported a substantial reduction of pain and NSAID consumption, with average pain intensity reducing by 72% after 2 months.
- Acupuncture may be a useful treatment option in women with period pain, particularly those for whom NSAIDs or oral contraceptives are unsuitable.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Painful menstrual cramps (dysmenorrhoea) can either be "primary" (without a known cause) or "secondary" (resulting from another pelvic disease). The main symptom is pain, but this pain is not reduced by anti-inflammatory medications in around 1/4 of cases. This study suggests that women with this problem might want to try acupuncture. I say "might" as it was only a small study, but given the large impact these cramps can have on daily life, it would be worth a try if standard medications are not helping.

<http://ecam.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/5/2/227>

Olive oil may protect against ulcerative colitis

The facts:

- Dietary factors involved in the development of ulcerative colitis were assessed in over 25,000 adults in the UK who were followed for about 10 years.
- When the diets of people who developed ulcerative colitis were compared with those who didn't, the researchers found that diets high in oleic acid were protective against the disease.
- Oleic acid is a monounsaturated fatty acid found in olive oil, peanut oil and grapeseed oil, as well as in butter and certain margarines.



Dr Shaun Holt:

Ulcerative colitis is an inflammatory disease of the bowel that affects 120,000 people in the UK and 1 million in the USA. Symptoms include abdominal pain, diarrhoea and weight loss. This study of more than 25,000 people, none of whom had ulcerative colitis at the outset, found that those with the highest intake of oleic acid, which is present in olive oil, had a 90 per cent lower risk of developing the disease. The researchers concluded that "... around half of the cases of ulcerative colitis could be prevented if larger amounts of oleic acid were consumed. Two-to-three tablespoons of olive oil per day would have a protective effect".

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100502080246.htm>

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