











In this issue:

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Welcome to Natural Health Review Issue 30.

Each issue of Natural Health Research Review highlights a selection of recently published studies. In addition to providing 3 key facts for each study, I've added some thoughts about why they might be of interest and how their findings can potentially affect current practice.

In this issue we have news that eating fish once a week (particularly canned tuna and dark-meat fish) may protect eyesight in the elderly, by providing protective omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D. We also have a fascinating study that shows that adding sugar to certain antibiotics can boost their bacteria-battling ability; this technique could lead to the development of cheaper, more effective treatments for bacterial infections.

We hope you enjoy the latest issue of Natural Health Research Review, and welcome your feedback.

Kind Regards,

Prof Shaun Holt

shaun@naturalhealthreview.org

Fish oils prevent age-related eye damage in women

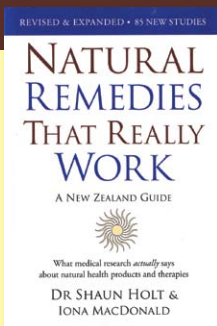
The facts:

- 38,022 female health professionals without age-related macular degeneration (AMD) completed a detailed food frequency questionnaire before being followed for approximately 10 years.
- 235 cases of AMD were reported during follow-up.
- Women who ate at least 1 serving of fish per week had almost half the risk of AMD over the 10-year period than women who ate less than 1 serving per month.

Prof Shaun Holt:

We know that omega-3 fatty acids can reduce the chances of getting age-related macular degeneration, a common condition which leads to worsening eyesight as we get older. This study adds further evidence and gives us some new information - eating fish just once a week can have a preventative effect and the most effective fish are canned tuna fish and dark-meat fish, such as mackerel, salmon, sardines, bluefish, and swordfish. Get your omega-3 from fish if you can, but if you are not sure you are getting enough, and many of us aren't, you can top it up with a daily supplement.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/archophthalmol.2011.34>



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Vitamin D protects eyesight in the elderly

The facts:

- 1,313 postmenopausal women had their vitamin D levels measured, and were asked about their diet and how much time they spent outdoors, before being followed for several years.
- Those who consumed an average of 720 IU vitamin D per day were 59% less likely to develop age-related macular degeneration (AMD) than those who consumed less than 120 IU per day.
- Women with the highest levels of vitamin D achieved them through foods such as milk, fish and fortified margarine, rather than sunlight.

Prof Shaun Holt:

As well as the omega-3 content, could oily fish also be providing people with vitamin D, which may also reduce the chances of having AMD? AMD is the leading cause of blindness globally and in this study, those with the highest levels of vitamin D were 60% less likely to suffer from AMD. Taking high doses of vitamin D for long periods of time could weaken bones and so if you take vitamin D supplements do not take too much – a dose of 25 micrograms (1,000 IU) or less a day is unlikely to cause any harm but still make up for any shortfall in the diet.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/archophthalmol.2011.48>

Mercury from fish poses no threat to heart health

The facts:

- Mercury levels in the toenail clippings of 3,427 people with a history of heart disease or stroke were compared with those in people without heart problems.
- When patients were grouped according to mercury levels, those with higher mercury exposures did not have a higher risk of cardiovascular disease.
- These findings showed that mercury exposure from eating fish (at levels commonly seen in the US) is not linked to an increased risk of heart disease or stroke.

Prof Shaun Holt:

Sometimes the methods involved in research can be as interesting as the research itself ... I bet you never knew your toenail clippings could be so useful! And this study is very useful, mercury from eating fish has been a concern for a number of years and this study shows that it is not something to be concerned about; given the many large benefits from eating fish, this is good news indeed.

<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1006876>

Sugar helps antibiotics kill persistent bacteria

The facts:

- Bacterial persisters (bacteria that go dormant in the presence of antibiotics, then flare up again later) have been implicated in chronic and recurrent infections.
- When the antibiotic gentamicin was combined with various sugars before being applied to E.coli and Staph aureus persisters in a petri dish, 99% of the bacteria were killed.
- It was speculated that the sugars woke the bacterial persisters out of their dormant state just enough for them to take in the antibiotics and die.

Prof Shaun Holt:

This remarkable paper published in the prestigious journal Nature found that adding sugar to antibiotics can boost their bacteria-killing ability. The mechanism appeared to be that the sugar helped the drugs wipe out “persisters”, bacteria that evade antibiotics by going dormant only to flare up again once the danger has passed. The addition of sugar, fructose in particular, led to over 99% of the bacterial persisters being eradicated. The lead researcher described the mechanism by saying the use of sugar “got them up off the ground so we can punch them and knock them out,” and that the sugar got the bacterial persisters to wake up out of their dormant state just enough that they took in the antibiotics, which killed them. These findings may also partially explain why honey, which consists of concentrated sugars, is so effective at killing bacteria in skin infections.

<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v473/n7346/full/nature10069.html>

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Tomato paste protects against sun-induced skin damage

The facts:

- 20 healthy women were given 55g tomato paste (containing 16mg lycopene) in olive oil, or olive oil alone, every day for 12 weeks, during which time their skin sensitivity to UV radiation was tested.
- At the end of the study, the duration of UV radiation needed to cause skin redness was much longer in women who ingested tomato paste.
- The lycopene in tomato paste appears to protect the skin against acute and potentially longer-term UV damage.

Prof Shaun Holt:

Nature often provides us with solutions to health problems and this study found that eating bright red tomatoes can stop you being bright red from sunburn. Lycopene, a powerful antioxidant, is the active ingredient, and I would expect there will soon be products available. Previous studies in large populations have found that lycopene intake is associated with reduced sunburn, but this study provides direct evidence that it prevents UV radiation damage.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2133.2010.10057.x>



Independent commentary by

Prof Shaun Holt,
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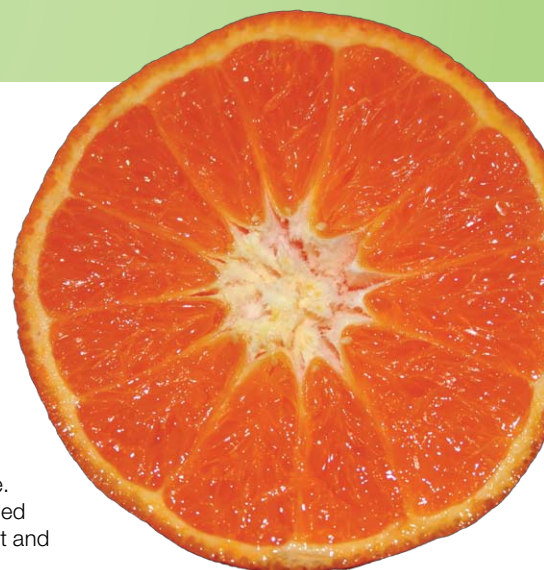


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Tangerines good for heart health?

The facts:

- Nobiletin is a pigment extracted from tangerine peel that has shown protective effects against cardiovascular disease and obesity in mice.
- Two groups of mice were fed a diet high in fats and simple sugars; the first group became obese and showed metabolic changes linked to diabetes and heart disease. The second group, which had nobiletin added to its food, gained a normal amount of weight and showed no adverse metabolic changes.
- Interestingly, nobiletin has been shown to be 10 times more protective against heart attacks, diabetes and stroke than the grapefruit extract naringenin.



Prof Shaun Holt:

Animal studies have to be either very interesting or very exciting to make it into the review, as the results may not necessarily apply to people upon further testing. This study in mice fit the bill - a pigment found in tangerine peel prevented weight gain and reduced the risk of heart disease and diabetes. The media coverage of this study said that we all know how an apple a day is supposed to keep the doctor away - now it seems the same may be true for tangerines!

<http://diabetes.diabetesjournals.org/content/60/5/1446.short>

Yoga reduces the incidence of irregular heartbeats

The facts:

- 49 patients with an irregular heartbeat known as atrial fibrillation underwent a 3-month yoga programme involving a 45-minute session with a yoga instructor 3 times per week, plus daily yoga exercises at home.
- Heart monitors measured episodes of irregular heartbeats throughout the trial, and patients completed short self-administered surveys to assess their levels of anxiety, depression and overall quality of life.
- Compared with the 3-month period before the programme commenced, yoga halved the number of episodes of atrial fibrillation, reduced depression and anxiety scores, and improved general health and vitality.

Prof Shaun Holt:

Atrial fibrillation is a common problem and is a leading cause of stroke. It is a form of irregular heartbeat and is most common in the elderly. This smallish study found that yoga could reduce episodes of the irregular heartbeat by around a half and also significantly reduced depression and anxiety and improved physical functioning, general health, vitality, social functioning and mental health. The authors of the research stressed that yoga should be in addition to any medicines that have been prescribed for the condition, not instead of.

http://content.onlinejacc.org/cgi/reprint/57/14_Suppl_S/E129.pdf

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Moderate fish intake reduces risk of repeat preterm delivery

The facts:

- This study estimated the association between fish consumption and repeat preterm birth in a specially selected group of high-risk pregnant women who had previously had a preterm delivery.
- Moderate fish intake (up to three meals per week) before 22 weeks' gestation was found to be associated with a reduction in repeat preterm birth.
- More than moderate consumption did not confer any additional benefit.

Prof Shaun Holt:

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend moderate fish consumption during pregnancy, moderate being defined as up to 3 meals per week. This study adds to this recommendation, finding that moderate fish intake before 22 weeks of gestation was associated with a reduction in repeat preterm birth. There were no additional reductions obtained by eating more than a moderate amount of fish.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/AOG.0b013e31821645dc>

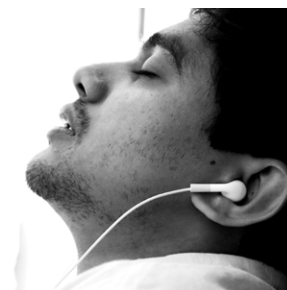
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Music therapy helps fibromyalgia

The facts:

- 60 patients with fibromyalgia were assigned to relaxation therapy (based on guided imagery and music therapy) or to a control group for 4 weeks to determine the effects of music on pain and depression.
- The treatment group reported a significant reduction in pain and depression after 4 weeks compared with the control group.
- Relaxation with guided imagery and receptive music therapy may therefore be a useful self-management intervention to reduce pain and depression in patients with fibromyalgia.



Prof Shaun Holt:

Spanish researchers have discovered a novel method to help people suffering from fibromyalgia that does not involve taking medications – music therapy. Patients were given a CD to listen to at home and the researchers measured a number of variables associated with the main symptoms of fibromyalgia including pain intensity, quality of life, impact of the condition on patient's daily life, sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, self-efficacy and well-being. The treatment group reported a significant reduction in pain and depression at week 4 compared with the control group.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pmn.2010.09.004>

Tai chi helps mood in patients with chronic heart failure

The facts:

- 100 patients with chronic heart failure (HF) were assigned to participate in a group-based 12-week tai chi exercise programme or time-matched heart education training.
- Tai chi significantly improved mood and quality of life but didn't improve patient performance on a walking test.
- Based on these findings, tai chi appears to be a safe alternative to conventional exercise training in patients with HF.

Prof Shaun Holt:

This intriguing study, published in Archives of Internal Medicine, found that tai chi exercise may improve quality of life, mood, and exercise self-efficacy in patients with chronic heart failure. The lead researcher commented that "...Further research will help us better understand how integrated therapies like tai chi can affect the body and mind, and how we can best offer these exercises to those that may benefit most". It is likely that similar benefits would be obtained by patients practicing yoga.

<http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/171/8/750>

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