











## In this issue:

-  **Strategies to increase dietary fatty acids**
-  **Acupuncture beats aspirin for chronic headache**
-  **Vitamin D may protect against placental infection**
-  **Selenium supplements may boost heart health**
-  **Amino acid may ease symptoms of fatigue**
-  **Oily fish may boost prostate cancer survival rate**
-  **Probiotic may prevent respiratory illnesses**
-  **Multivitamins and minerals help children's brain function**
-  **Vitamin K may have anti-diabetes benefits**
-  **Apples and onions may protect athletes from flu**

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PHARMACY GUILD OF NEW ZEALAND (PNGZ)

## Welcome to Natural Health Review Issue 19.

I hope you had a merry festive season and managed to take a well-earned break. As usual, we have a little something for everyone this month. An important study provides answers to how much omega-3 is delivered by different diets, with a fish oil supplement seeming the best option to take if you want to increase your intake. Other findings reported this month are that vitamin D during pregnancy may lead to a reduction in late pregnancy complications, selenium-rich food (e.g. Brazil nuts and eggs) may improve heart health, oily fish may boost prostate cancer survival rate, and increasing fruit and vegetable intake might keep athletes healthier.

I hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Kind Regards,

**Dr Shaun Holt**

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## Strategies to increase dietary fatty acids

### The facts:

- Four fish oil-enriched diets were assessed to see if they provided increased omega-3 intake compared with a traditional Canadian diet.
- All 4 diets (a fish oil supplement diet, an EPA + DHA-enriched foods diet, a traditional whole foods/fish diet, and a diet combining fish with EPA/DHA enriched foods) provided higher amounts of omega-3 fatty acids than a typical Canadian diet, at little extra cost.
- These results showed that fish oil supplements, functional foods and whole foods can be used successfully and cost-effectively to increase the EPA and DHA content of an everyday diet.



### Dr Shaun Holt:

This hugely important study provides answers to how much omega-3 is delivered by different diets. Worryingly, only around 0.1g a day is delivered by a traditional diet but this can be increased to around 1g a day by taking fish oil capsules. This is the sort of intake that the American Heart Association recommends for people with heart disease. Having a diet enriched with omega-3 foods except fish only increased the intake to around 0.5g a day, whereas a diet with lots of fish increased this to over 3g a day. The cost of taking a fish oil supplement was less than the cost of extra fish in the diet and so I would argue that for most people, a fish oil supplement will give you a healthy omega-3 intake without breaking the bank.

<http://www.jacn.org/cgi/content/abstract/27/5/538>

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## Acupuncture beats aspirin for chronic headache

### The facts:

- 31 studies were reviewed that compared the effects of needle acupuncture with sham acupuncture, drug treatment or other nondrug treatments in adults with chronic headache.
- Most of the trials that compared acupuncture with sham acupuncture found a trend in favour of acupuncture in terms of response.
- Acupuncture was also superior to drug treatment for headache intensity and frequency, physical function and response rate.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Lots of studies have looked at the effectiveness of acupuncture for chronic headaches, and so what is the overall benefit when all the studies are looked at together? This look at 31 studies found that, not only is there no doubt that acupuncture does work for chronic headache, it is not just that needles are being stuck into the person, as sham acupuncture (where needles are placed incorrectly or are not penetrating) did not work. Amazingly, the researchers also found that acupuncture was better than taking medications such as aspirin.

<http://www.anesthesia-analgesia.org/cgi/content/abstract/107/6/2038>

## Vitamin D may protect against placental infection

### The facts:

- The active form of vitamin D helps the release of an antimicrobial agent within the body known as CAMP.
- When placenta tissue infected with E. coli was exposed to vitamin D metabolites, the release of CAMP increased and the number of bacteria in cells decreased.
- Vitamin D may therefore stimulate immune responses in the placenta and protect against placenta infection.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

A fully developed placenta weighs around half a kilogram and connects to the foetus by the 60cm long umbilical cord, providing nutrition and many other necessary functions for the growing baby. This study looked at the effects of vitamin D on cells from placentas and found that it could protect them from infection. These findings need to be further assessed in clinical studies to see if making sure that pregnant women have enough vitamin D can lead to a reduction in late pregnancy complications.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1095/biolreprod.108.073577>



## Selenium supplements may boost heart health

### The facts:

- 433 patients with coronary artery disease (CAD) received placebo or selenium daily for 3 months to examine the effect of selenium on heart health.
- Selenium had dose-dependent antioxidant effects in patients with CAD.
- These encouraging short-term results with selenium warrant follow-up in long term studies.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

The results of this large study suggest that selenium supplementation may be of benefit for patients with coronary artery disease, as it increased activity of a key enzyme in patients with this disease. This enzyme basically acts as a built-in antioxidant. However, it is too early to recommend selenium before further clinical studies are undertaken. Brazil nuts are probably the best dietary source, with other sources including eggs, some meats and seafoods.

[http://www.ahjonline.com/article/S0002-8703\(08\)00789-8/abstract](http://www.ahjonline.com/article/S0002-8703(08)00789-8/abstract)



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

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## Amino acid may ease symptoms of fatigue

### The facts:

- 17 healthy volunteers were given the amino acid L-ornithine or placebo for a week to determine the effects of the amino acid on physical fatigue after exercise.
- L-ornithine significantly lessened the fatigue felt after exercise, particularly in women, and improved the rate of recovery.
- The beneficial effects of L-ornithine were due to increased efficiency of energy consumption and improved excretion of ammonia.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

WThis was a small study but it still produced results that were both clinically and statistically significant. Only 8 days of L-ornithine supplementation were enough to improve recovery from a standardized physical task, reduce feelings of fatigue, improve performance and had beneficial effects with respect to relevant blood chemical markers. The authors point out that levels of this amino acid are not high in meat or fish and so a nutritional supplement would need to be taken to obtain these benefits. You can either wait for the results from bigger studies or you could try this supplement at this stage to see if it improves your exercise performance.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nutres.2008.08.008>



## Oily fish may boost prostate cancer survival rate

### The facts:

- The relationship between prostate cancer and omega-3 fatty acid intake from fish or seafood was examined in a large study of over 20,000 men.
- Among men who were diagnosed with prostate cancer during the study, those who ate a lot of fish or seafood had a much lower risk of dying from prostate cancer than those who ate very little fish.
- Fish intake therefore appears to have no effect on the chances of being diagnosed with prostate cancer, but may improve prostate cancer survival.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Studies with this sort of design are not usually very convincing, as there is usually no proof that the association, in this case between fish intake and prostate cancer survival, is a causative one. However, the most convincing aspect of the results of this study was the magnitude of the reduction in mortality: men who ate fish at least 5 times a week had an almost 50% reduced chance of dying from the disease, compared to men who ate fish less than one time a week on average. Prostate cancer is very slow growing and many men who develop this cancer die of something totally unrelated to the disease such as heart disease.

<http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/88/5/1297>



## Probiotic may prevent respiratory illnesses

### The facts:

- A group of 50 mechanically ventilated, critically ill patients with a tracheal intubation had their mouths and throats cleansed with the probiotic bacteria Lactobacillus plantarum 299 (Lp299) or the antiseptic chlorhexidine.
- High-risk bacteria were found in mouth swabs from 8 patients treated with Lp299 versus 13 patients treated with chlorhexidine.
- The probiotic Lp299 was slightly better than chlorhexidine in reducing the risk of ventilator-associated infection, although the difference was not statistically significant.

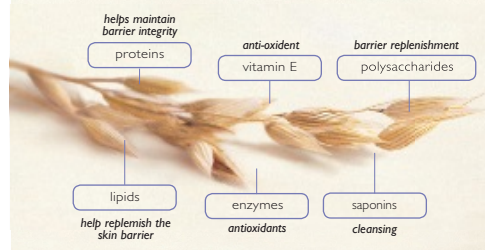
### Dr Shaun Holt:

A pneumonia is a potentially lethal infection of the lung and critically ill patients who need mechanical ventilation are at high risk from dying from a pneumonia caused by bacteria from the mouth and throat. This pilot study found that a probiotic was better than the antiseptic chemical that is currently routinely used. Bigger studies are needed as the improvement was not statistically significant, but if bigger studies confirm these initial findings then more patients may survive after being critically ill and ventilated.

<http://ccforum.com/content/12/6/R136/abstract>

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## Multivitamins and minerals help children's brain function

### The facts:

- 81 healthy children had their brain function and mood tested before and after taking placebo or a commercially available vitamins/mineral product (Pharmaton Kiddi™) for 3 months.
- Children who took the supplement had better performances on some attention tests but mood wasn't affected at all.
- These results suggest that vitamin/mineral supplementation may improve brain function in healthy children.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Do your children get a perfect diet? If not then a good multivitamin would be likely to correct any nutritional deficiencies. This intriguing study found improvements in certain tests of mental functioning after just 12 weeks of taking a multivitamin, compared to those children who were receiving the placebo. Other than the cost, which is usually quite trivial, there is little downside to taking a multivitamin, for children or adults, as if all or some of the components are not needed they are simply excreted.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0007114508959213>



## Apples and onions may protect athletes from flu

### The facts:

- Exercise-induced stress can weaken immunity against infections such as upper respiratory tract infection.
- Oral quercetin given to mice for a week helped protect against exposure to influenza virus after exercise-induced stress.
- Quercetin is a flavonoid found in a variety of fruit and vegetables.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

We know that hard training can make you more prone to coughs and colds and that vitamin C can reduce the chances of getting colds under these circumstances. Influenza is different from a bad head cold – it is a nasty viral infection that also causes muscle pains, chills and fever and confines even the toughest of people to a few days in bed. This animal study found that quercetin, found in fruit and vegetables, was able to reduce the chances of getting flu in mice whose immune systems were compromised by exercise-induced stress.

<http://ajpregu.physiology.org/cgi/content/abstract/295/2/R505>

## Vitamin K may have anti-diabetes benefits

### The facts:

- 355 nondiabetic men and women aged over 60 were given vitamin K supplements for 3 years.
- Vitamin K reduced insulin resistance compared with controls after 3 years in men but not in women.
- It was concluded that vitamin K at doses achievable in the diet may protect against the onset of diabetes among older men.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

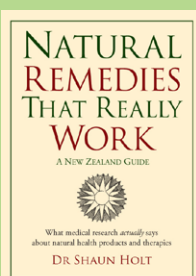
This was a large well designed study with a definite conclusion: a vitamin K supplement will reduce insulin resistance in older men, which in turn should lead to a reduced chance of getting diabetes. Why this should only occur in men is not known. Green leafy vegetables such as cauliflower and brussels sprouts are the best nutritional sources of vitamin K, which also has roles in blood clotting and bone metabolism.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.2337/dc08-1204>



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