











Natural Health Review

Proven Natural Health

Issue 6 - 2007

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Welcome to the sixth Natural Health Review issue and Happy New Year to you.

As we mentioned in December we are about to launch a new jobs section on the website that will feature all the latest job vacancies within the industry. We plan to have it up and running by the end of Jan.

This month we have featured interesting studies on acupuncture for osteoarthritis and the use of magnesium for blood sugar levels. Don't forget if you have friends or colleagues who you think may be interested in Natural Health Review please do pass it on or let them know they can subscribe free online. I hope you enjoy this edition and welcome your comments and feedback.

Kind regards,

Dr Shaun Holt

shaunholt@naturalhealthreview.co.nz

Benefits of omega 3 for alzheimer's disease

The facts:

- 174 patients with Alzheimer Disease took either omega-3 fatty acid or a dummy drug for 6 months followed by omega-3 fatty acid supplement for a further 3 months.
- Patients with very mild Alzheimer Disease who took omega-3 fatty acid showed a slower rate of decline in cognitive function than those who took the dummy drug.
- There was no difference between the treatment groups in patients with more marked Alzheimer Disease.

Dr Shaun Holt:

As we have had with each issue, we have another great study showing the benefits of omega-3 fish oils. It would be unrealistic to think that fish oil will cure Alzheimer's disease, but this study suggests some possible benefit for those with mild disease, which may delay or slow down the progression. Further trials with more participants are needed.

<http://archneur.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/63/10/1402>

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Glucosamine in chronic knee pain

The facts:

- Forty five people with long term knee pain took part in a study to find out which patients responded best to treatment with glucosamine sulphate.
- After 12 weeks of daily treatment patients report an improvement in the amount of pain they experienced and were less restricted in their daily activities.
- The results suggested that glucosamine was of similar benefit to patients regardless of age, body mass index or the presence of osteoarthritis, although patients with mild osteoarthritis had a slightly better response in terms of daily activity restriction than patients without osteoarthritis.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Osteoarthritis is the type of arthritis you get from wear and tear on your joints. The protective cartilage wears away and bone then rubs on bone, causing swelling and pain. The positive effects of glucosamine have been known for a long time, and this study adds to the body of evidence for its use. Although it was a small study, it appeared that most people benefited from the supplement, no matter how severe their disease, their age or whether they were overweight.

<http://www.acsm-msse.org/>

Acupuncture for osteoarthritis of the knee or hip

The facts:

- A clinical study was performed to investigate whether acupuncture improved long term knee or hip pain associated with osteoarthritis.
- Approximately 700 patients received either standard care alone or 15 sessions of acupuncture over a 3 month period in conjunction with standard care.
- After 3 and 6 months patients who received acupuncture reported a greater improvement in their osteoarthritis than patients who received only standard care. An additional group of approximately 2900 patients who also received acupuncture reported a similar improvement in their symptoms.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Around a quarter of visits to GPs are for arthritis and so it is clear that we need to find better treatments if we can. The hips and knees are the joints most commonly affected, as they are the major weight-bearing joints of the body. This was a huge study in a major arthritis journal and so its results should be taken seriously. Although we do not know the mechanism, it would appear that acupuncture is worth trying if your hip or knee replacement operation has been cancelled again!

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/113446034/ABSTRACT>



Magnesium found to help control blood sugar

The facts:

- About 4100 African American women took part in a study to investigate the link between dietary magnesium and calcium and the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- Food intake questionnaires completed over an 8 year period showed that women with a low intake of dietary magnesium had a greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those who had a higher intake.
- Women who ate whole grains and low-fat dairy produce daily were less likely to develop type 2 diabetes than those who ate these foodstuffs less than once a week.


Dr Shaun Holt:

It is becoming increasingly common to test treatments in different ethnic groups. There are many examples of where certain treatments work better in one group than another, and this is almost certainly related to the different groups having some different genes. This is of particular relevance in New Zealand where we have several major ethnic groups. This study confirms previous research showing that magnesium in the diet can reduce the chances of getting diabetes, and that this occurs in another ethnic group.

<http://care.diabetesjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/29/10/2238>



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



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Results of Auckland University CTRU's 'Honey as an Adjuvant Leg Ulcer Therapy Trial' (HALT)¹ will be available from third quarter 2006. HALT¹ explores clinical efficacy of UMF® Manuka Honey in the treatment of mixed venous leg ulcers.

See <https://www.ctru.auckland.ac.nz/research/halt/index.html> for more details.

1 ISRCTN06161544 'HALT' is an open, multi-centre, randomised controlled clinical trial, assessing the effectiveness of UMF® Manuka Honey in healing patients with mixed venous leg ulcers. (Manuka Honey used as an adjuvant to compression therapy, in comparison to 'usual care').

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Carotenoid supplements linked to improved AIDS survival

The facts:

- In this Canadian study just over 300 AIDS patients received a multivitamin supplement with approximately half the patients also receiving an additional daily β -carotene supplement.
- The level of carotenoids in the patients' blood doubled after 18 months in those patients receiving β -carotene.
- Patients who had higher blood carotenoid levels at the start of the study or who received β -carotene during the study had a slightly higher survival rate than those who did not.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This was a large and well-conducted study published in a top-notch journal. The result was a trend towards more deaths in those patients who were not taken the supplement of carotenoids, although this was not statistically significant. Further studies are needed to confirm the findings and determine the mechanism of action, but there is enough data in this paper to suggest that this supplement may well be beneficial to people with the HIV virus.

<http://www.nature.com/ejcn/journal/v60/n11/abs/1602447a.html>

Please see Dr Shaun Holt's new Natural Health Column at www.pharmacydirect.co.nz and in the Bay of Plenty Times every Tuesday

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Get fit to lower your colon cancer risk



The facts:

- Approximately 200 patients who had undergone a colonoscopy in the previous 3 months, either continued their usual low exercise life-style or started a 12-month exercise programme, in a study to investigate the link between exercise and colon cancer.
- Cells from the colon (lower bowel) were examined at the start and end of the study, for specific markers that are associated with colon cancer.
- Male patients, who had performed on average, at least 250 minutes of exercise a week, were found to have a lower level of cancer markers than patients with a lower level or no exercise. No effect was seen in women.

Dr Shaun Holt:

In this large study, strenuous exercise resulted in changes in the bowel cells that would be likely to reduce the chance on cancer. Some caution is required, as the researchers did not actually prove that it reduced bowel cancer. But they did provide some evidence and, importantly, a mechanism to explain how exercise could reduce bowel cancer risk. Overall, a fascinating study and one more great reason to buy some decent running shoes.

<http://cebp.aacrjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/15/9/1588>

Melatonin reduces night-time high blood pressure

The facts:

- 38 patients with night time high blood pressure took part in a clinical study to investigate the effects of treatment with melatonin.
- Patients received either controlled release melatonin or a dummy drug before bedtime for 4 weeks.
- Treatment with melatonin resulted in a decrease in blood pressure with the greatest effect being seen between 2am and 5am.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Melatonin is best known for its role in the biological clock. It is secreted from the pineal gland, which is the size of a pea and sits in the middle of the brain. Some people have high blood pressure particularly at night and this study looked at the effect of melatonin. The results were very exciting in that they were clinically significant (resulted in a decrease in blood pressure that is big enough to be important) and also statistically significant (the results were unlikely to be due to chance).

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science>





Preventing blood clotting with tomato extract

The facts:

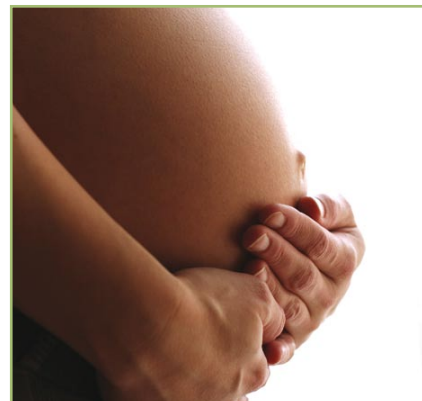
- A supplement containing tomato extract was given to 90 healthy people in this study to find out if tomatoes have any effect on blood clotting.
- Blood samples collected from people who had taken the tomato extract did not clot as easily as blood taken from people who had not taken the extract.
- An amount of extract equivalent to 6 tomatoes was found to be more effective than 2 tomatoes. The authors suggest that tomatoes may be effective at reducing the risk of thrombosis.

Dr Shaun Holt:

You don't want your platelets to be too sticky! Platelets are part of the blood clotting system and too much clotting can cause blockages in blood vessels, leading to conditions such as heart attacks and strokes. This is great research, as the researchers have built on the laboratory findings that tomato extracts reduce platelet activity. This study has looked at whether the same effect occurs in humans, and the great news is that it does. The fact that there is a dose-response relationship (ie more tomatoes leads to a bigger effect) adds more weight still.

<http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/84/3/561>

Mum's vitamin E may affect child's asthma risk



The facts:

- Almost 1900 women were asked to complete a questionnaire about their food intake during pregnancy.
- Their children were studied for the first five years after birth to see if they developed asthma.
- The results indicated that children were less likely to develop asthma and wheeze if their mothers ate foods containing vitamin E and zinc during pregnancy.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This cohort study (where a group of participants are followed for a period of time) was published in one of the most important respiratory research journals. Women who took vitamin E whilst pregnant were less likely to have children who had asthma or asthma-like symptoms. The same result was found for zinc. With the increasing number of people around the world who have asthma and other allergic disorders, this is potentially an important finding. However, it remains to be seen whether the vitamin E and zinc intake directly caused the reduction in asthma, or were instead associated with other factors which led to the decrease that was seen.

<http://ajrccm.atsjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/174/5/499>

Magnesium and C-reactive protein levels

The facts:

- People with a high level of C-reactive protein in their blood are more likely to suffer from inflammatory conditions.
- An American study found that people who consumed less than 50% of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of magnesium were almost twice as likely to have elevated C-reactive protein than those who consumed more than the RDA.
- Approximately a quarter of the people surveyed took a magnesium supplement, of which 60% met the RDA compared with only 22% of people who did not take a magnesium supplement.

Dr Shaun Holt:

CRP is a common blood test for many people in hospital, as it tells us how much inflammation is occurring in the body. In this study, those with low magnesium in their diet were more likely to have higher CRP levels and those taking a supplement were less likely to have raised CRP levels. It is not clear whether lower CRP levels result in better health outcomes, but this is interesting research and worth seeing what future studies show.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?>

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