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Welcome to Natural Health Review Issue 21.

A number of interesting articles on vitamins are included this month, with benefits seen in childhood asthma, pre-eclampsia, coeliac disease and gout. But the most exciting news for me would have to be the development of probiotic ice-cream, healthy and delicious. I just might have to eat a bit more shredded wheat cereal for breakfast though ...

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

Kind Regards,

Dr Shaun Holt

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Shredded wheat for weight-loss

The facts:

- 41 overweight or obese men and women ate ready-to-eat cereal (one 45g pre-packaged serving with 125ml semi-skimmed milk) for breakfast and lunch for 2 weeks then just for breakfast for a further 4 weeks to see if they could lose weight; other meals were not restricted.
- Significant weight loss was seen after 2 weeks and was maintained through to the end of the 6-week study period.
- People who ate a variety of cereals had better weight loss results than those who were restricted to a single brand.



Dr Shaun Holt:

Losing weight is hard for most people and impossible for some. This novel study looked at whether eating a pre-packed serving of breakfast cereal for breakfast and lunch, and eating other things during the rest of the day, led to weight loss. The answer was that it did and the researchers suggested that the reason may be that fibre makes people feel full. Fibre is also good for you, so what's the catch? The study was only for 6 weeks - many diets work for a few weeks and then people lose the motivation to follow them. By all means try this, but 1 or 2 year studies are needed before it can be widely recommended.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-3010.2008.01723.x>

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Omega-3, vit C and zinc may ease childhood asthma

The facts:

- 60 children with asthma were given dietary omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin C and zinc, either alone or together, for 6 weeks to see if their symptoms improved.
- Lung function and asthma control improved significantly with all 3 supplements alone, and even more so when the supplements were taken together.
- Inflammation in the lungs also improved after taking the nutritional supplements.

Dr Shaun Holt:

This study adds to the body of evidence suggesting that omega-3 is good for asthma. The researchers also found benefits from zinc and vitamin C (both of which are found in a multivitamin). However, it could be that these 3 supplements are lacking in the diet of the children who took part in the study, in Egypt, and the results may not apply in Westernized countries. Children with asthma who require inhaled corticosteroids should definitely not stop using their inhalers based on the results of this study, but caregivers might consider giving the child daily supplements of omega-3 and a multivitamin.

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/121644801/abstract>

'Great potential' of probiotic ice-cream

The facts:

- Brazilian scientists have been investigating the use of ice-cream as a vehicle for probiotics.
- Technical difficulties they addressed included storage under freezing conditions, which strain to use, how much of the strain to use and when to add it to the product.
- The idea has great potential because ice-cream is liked by all age groups and social levels.



Dr Shaun Holt:

I love novel ideas like this one. There is a large and expanding body of research on the health benefits of taking probiotics – live bacteria – but one issue is that they often need to be stored in the fridge. Brazilian scientists have worked out how to add probiotics to ice-cream. What a great idea and a practical way for people to get the health benefits of probiotics. Studies need to be undertaken to see if probiotic ice-creams can improve medical conditions, but my feeling is that they will.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2009.03.020>

Probiotics may ease anxiety: pilot study

The facts:

- 39 Toronto residents with chronic fatigue syndrome were given daily supplements of either Lactobacillus casei strain Shirota (in a sachet containing 24 billion colony forming units) or placebo for two months to investigate the effects of the probiotic on anxiety.
- At the end of the study, anxiety levels in patients receiving the probiotic were significantly reduced.
- These results suggest there may be a gut-brain interface mediated by microbes in the intestinal tract, and should be further investigated.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Chronic fatigue syndrome is still poorly understood and as a result, there are few effective treatments. This small but fascinating study found that probiotics reduced anxiety in people with chronic fatigue syndrome. The study raises more questions than it provides answers and to quote a McMaster University Professor: "This area of enteric neuroscience is very exciting ... how the gut microbiota works together with the brain and nervous system to promote health and well-being."

<http://www.gutpathogens.com/content/pdf/1757-4749-1-6.pdf>



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

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CoQ10 may cut pre-eclampsia in high-risk women



The facts:

- 235 pregnant women at risk for pre-eclampsia were randomised to take 200mg coenzyme Q10 or placebo daily from week 20 of pregnancy until delivery.
- One-fifth (20%) of all participants developed pre-eclampsia during their pregnancy.
- Supplementation with coenzyme Q10 almost halved the risk of developing pre-eclampsia compared with placebo.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Pre-eclampsia affects 2-3% of pregnancies, results in large increases in the mother's blood pressure and is estimated to cause 60,000 deaths a year. Studies with vitamins C and E have been disappointing, but this study found a rate of pre-eclampsia in high-risk women of 26% in the placebo group and 14% in those taking coenzyme Q10 ie. almost halving the risk. Oxidative stress plays a role in the development of pre-eclampsia and the antioxidant properties of coenzyme Q10 probably explain why it worked in this study.

[http://www.ijgo.org/article/S0020-7292\(08\)00562-6/abstract](http://www.ijgo.org/article/S0020-7292(08)00562-6/abstract)

Omega-3 may protect prostates from cancer

The facts:

- The diets of 466 men with aggressive prostate cancer and 478 controls were studied to assess the effect of omega-3 fatty acids on prostate cancer development and progression.
- Men with a higher intake of long chain omega-3 fatty acids had a reduced risk of aggressive prostate cancer.
- The effects of omega-3 were mediated by the COX-2 enzymatic pathway.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Is there anything that omega-3 cannot do? There are over 500,000 new cases of prostate cancer diagnosed in the world each year and it causes over 200,000 deaths. This large case-control study found that high omega-3 intakes were associated with a 2/3 reduction in the risk of aggressive prostate cancer, with a proposed mechanism being that it acts via the COX-2 enzyme pathway.

<http://clincancerres.aacrjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/1078-0432.CCR-08-2503v1>

Vitamin C may slash gout risk in men

The facts:

- This huge study investigated the relationship between vitamin C intake and gout over a 20-year period in >45,000 men who didn't have gout at the start of the study.
- Men who took at least 1500mg vitamin C daily had almost half the risk of gout compared with men who took <250mg vitamin C daily.
- For every 500mg increase in daily vitamin C intake, the risk of gout fell by 17%.

Dr Shaun Holt:

It's too late for me, I already have gout, but this massive survey of diets has found that higher vitamin C intake is independently associated with a lower risk of gout and that supplemental vitamin C intake may be beneficial in the prevention of gout. There is also a good explanation for these findings: a recent double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized trial has shown that higher vitamin C intake significantly reduces serum uric acid levels. A high uric acid level (causing crystals to form in joints) is the mechanism underlying gout.

<http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/169/5/502>



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Tai Chi shows promise as a stroke therapy

The facts:

- The effects of Tai Chi on standing balance were evaluated in 136 patients with chronic stroke.
- Patients practiced a short form of Tai Chi (a continuous sequence of 12 forms requiring whole-body movements and concentration) for 12 weeks.
- Tai Chi produced specific improvements in standing balance that were sustained even after training stopped.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Tai Chi has been shown to improve balance in older people. Balance is often affected in people who have suffered a stroke, so can Tai Chi help those people as well? A group of patients undertook 12 weeks of training in a short-form of Tai Chi consisting of 12 forms that require whole-body movements to be performed in a continuous sequence and demands concentration and this led to specific standing balance improvements.

<http://nnr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/1545968308326425v1>



Vitamins may help coeliac disease management

The facts:

- This study investigated the effects of vitamin B6, B12 and folic acid on homocysteine levels in patients with coeliac disease.
- Patients responded well to the supplements, and had lower plasma homocysteine levels than untreated patients.
- Regular intake of B vitamins may in theory improve heart health in people with coeliac disease by reducing levels of homocysteine, an amino acid linked to heart disease.

Dr Shaun Holt:

Coeliac disease affects around 1% of people and results in malabsorption ... the intestines do not absorb nutrients as well as they should leading to deficiencies of folic acid and vitamin B12 for example. This smallish study found that daily B vitamin supplements led to decreases in levels of homocysteine. In theory, this could reduce the chances of people with coeliac disease also getting heart disease, although bigger and better studies are needed.

<http://www.wignet.com/1007-9327/15/955.pdf>

Four times current vitamin D doses needed for winter levels: study

The facts:

- 112 premenopausal women were given 20mcg vitamin D3 (colecalfiferol) or placebo for approximately 6 months over winter to determine the effects of the supplement on stored vitamin D levels.
- At the end of the study, the increase in stored vitamin D in women receiving vitamin D3 was more than 3 times higher than that in women receiving placebo.
- Daily supplementation with vitamin D3 during winter achieved optimal serum vitamin D levels in 80% of the women.

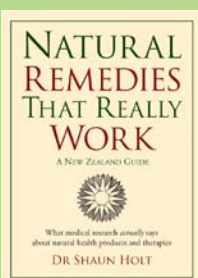
Dr Shaun Holt:

Our blood vitamin D levels generally drop in the winter months, as there is less sunshine on the skin which is needed for us to make our vitamin D. Recent research has shown us how important vitamin D is for our health, with protective effects having been shown for conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer. This simple but important study has shown that official recommendations for vitamin D intake may well be too low and that many people actually need around 20 mcg of vitamin D3 in the winter, around 4 times the current recommended dose.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3945/jn.108.096180>

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