











# Natural Health Review

Proven Natural Health

Issue 10 - 2007

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## Welcome to Natural Health Review.

This month we feature some interesting results on a large study that looked at calcium and vitamin D intake to help reduce the risk of breast cancer. The results were certainly positive for women who had not reached menopause.

We also look at the use of fish oil supplements used with regular exercise and the improvement in cardiovascular and metabolic health.

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

Kind Regards,

**Dr Shaun Holt**

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## Anethum and garlic for hyperlipidemic patients

### The facts:

- 150 patients with high blood lipids were treated with garlic 400mg twice daily, anethum 650mg twice daily or placebo for 6 weeks while also adhering to a reduced fat diet.
- Garlic successfully reduced total cholesterol levels by 12.1%, LDL cholesterol levels by 17.3% and increased HDL cholesterol levels by 15.7% compared with placebo.
- Patients who took anethum for 6 weeks experienced no beneficial effects on either total or LDL cholesterol levels.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

This study looked at the effects of 6 weeks treatment for high blood cholesterol levels with either garlic or anethum (better known as dill). Positive results were seen with garlic only, in terms of reducing cholesterol and triglycerides. The beneficial effects of garlic with respect to cardiovascular disease are well-known and further evidence has been provided here.

<http://www.lipidworld.com/content/6/1/5/abstract>

## When it's winter outside Prepare yourself inside.



Vitamins are supplementary to and not a replacement for a balanced diet. Always read the label and use only as directed.

Your immune system is working 24/7 to protect you, but as winter sets in, it can do with some support. There are a number of vitamins, minerals and herbs that can help. Taken ahead of time and combined with a healthy diet, exercise and sleep, they're your best defense against winter.

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## Current role of glucosamine in the treatment of osteoarthritis

### The facts:

- The authors of this study reviewed all the literature they could locate published between 1980 and 2005 on the use of glucosamine for arthritis
- The difference in products featured in the studies made the comparison difficult and one clear result was that not all glucosamine products give a beneficial result
- The authors concluded that the most consistently beneficial results for arthritis of the knee were achieved using glucosamine sulphate

### Dr Shaun Holt:

A well-conducted systematic review can be considered to be one of the highest levels of evidence. This review was difficult due to the wide disparity in study design, outcomes, populations and products used in the many trials looking at the use of glucosamine for osteoarthritis. Many GPs will have recommended glucosamine and this review justifies its use, with the key messages that it does work, and the best evidence suggests that the sulphate form should be used.

<http://rheumatology.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/46/5/731>

**Reference: Rheumatology 2007 46(5):731-735**



**Independent commentary and selection of studies by Dr Shaun Holt, BPharm (hons), MBChB (hons)**

**Please see Dr Shaun Holt's Natural Health Column at [www.pharmacydirect.co.nz](http://www.pharmacydirect.co.nz)**

## Lifelong selenium intake may slow age-related cognitive decline

### The facts:

- Lower selenium levels were linked with lower cognitive scores in Chinese individuals aged 65 years and older (most of whom had lived in the same rural village all their lives).
- Five different tests were used to assess cognitive function in these individuals and results were compared with selenium levels in nail samples to examine any possible association between lifelong selenium intake and cognitive function.
- As selenium levels improved so too did cognitive function.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

The low levels of selenium in New Zealand soil has been well documented. What is not clear is whether there are health implications from this, given that selenium is an antioxidant. Studies such of this one should always be interpreted with caution, as an association between low selenium intake and markers of dementia and reduced cognitive function does not necessarily mean that the low levels of selenium are the cause of the problem, or that additional selenium would prevent the problem. However, the finding of a dose-response relationship strengthens the possibility of a causal relationship.

<http://aje.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/kwk073v1>

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## Natural Solutions for Joint Mobility



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## Vitamin D for colorectal cancer prevention

### The facts:

- This meta-analysis of 5 studies examined the possible protective effect of vitamin D against colorectal cancer.
- The odds for developing colorectal cancer dropped as serum vitamin D levels increased; people with serum vitamin D levels  $\geq 33$  ng/ml had a 50% lower risk than those with levels  $\leq 12$  ng/ml.
- Based on these results it was suggested that a daily intake of 1000-2000 IU vitamin D3 might protect against colorectal cancer.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Meta-analysis can be a powerful statistical tool that can be used to clarify areas of uncertainty from groups of individual studies. Generally, studies have more power to detect true effects when they are larger, and the technique of meta-analysis involves adding the data from similar studies together in order to determine the true result. In this analysis, the results indicated that taking vitamin D does actually prevent the occurrence of colorectal cancer.

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

## Combining fish oil supplements with regular aerobic exercise



### The facts:

- Regular exercise combined with fish oil supplements can improve cardiovascular and metabolic health more effectively than either treatment alone.
- Overweight volunteers with cardiovascular risk factors were randomised to receive daily fish oils ( $\approx 1.9$ g omega-3 fatty acids), fish oils and exercise (45 min brisk walk 3 times per week), sunflower oil (6g) or sunflower oil and exercise for 12 weeks.
- Fish oil supplements reduced cardiovascular risk factors and weight and improved metabolic

health and would therefore be a useful addition to an exercise program aimed at reducing weight and cardiovascular risk.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

This is an interesting study from the prestigious American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, looking at the cardiovascular benefits of fish oil supplements from a different angle. The results were as you would expect, but it is still good to have this confirmed in a high quality clinical study: if you are exercising in order to reduce weight and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, then taking a fish oil supplement can increase the benefits from the exercise.

<http://www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/85/5/1267>

## Fibre and magnesium intake for type 2 diabetes



### The facts:

- The results from a large study (25 067 patients under observation for diabetes risk) and a meta-analysis (9 studies) have shown that an increased intake of cereal fibre and magnesium may reduce the risk of adult onset diabetes.
- Higher cereal fibre intake (but not fruit or vegetable fibre) was linked with low diabetes risk in both the large study and the meta-analysis.
- Magnesium intake did not affect diabetes risk in the large study but the meta-analysis showed high levels were associated with low risk.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

In our second meta-analysis of this issue of Natural Health Review, the question was whether higher intakes of fibre or magnesium in the diet can reduce the chance of developing adult-onset (type 2) diabetes. By adding up the data from the studies in the medical literature that had looked at this question, the researchers had access to the data equivalent to almost 200,000 person-years. The results from this data indicated that higher dietary intake of cereal fibre and magnesium may reduce the risk of developing diabetes.

<http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/167/9/956>

## Calcium, vitamin D and breast cancer risk

### The facts:

- Approximately 32,000 pre- and postmenopausal women were followed for an average of 10 years as part of the Women's Health Study to determine if calcium and vitamin D have a protective effect against breast cancer.
- A higher intake of calcium and vitamin D was moderately associated with a lower risk of breast cancer in premenopausal women.
- Increased levels of calcium and vitamin D did not protect against breast cancer in postmenopausal women.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

There is good data from studies conducted in animals showing that calcium and vitamin D may prevent breast cancer and further evidence is provided from this huge study. Higher intakes of calcium and vitamin D were associated with a lower chance of getting breast cancer, but only in women who had not yet had their menopause. Further, this protective effect seemed to be more pronounced for more aggressive forms of the cancer. However, as regular readers will know well, this association does not prove that the calcium and vitamin D cause this reduction – there is a chance that it could be a coincidental finding.

<http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/167/10/1050>

## Peppermint oil for irritable bowel syndrome

### The facts:

- Four weeks' treatment with peppermint oil (2 enteric-coated capsules twice daily) improved abdominal symptoms in patients with irritable bowel syndrome (Rome II criteria).
- 57 patients were included in the double-blind, placebo-controlled study which specifically excluded those patients with small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, lactose intolerance or celiac disease.
- After 4 weeks, 75% of patients treated with peppermint oil showed a >50% improvement in symptom scores compared with 38% of placebo recipients; this difference was statistically significant.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Peppermint has been thought for centuries to help with stomach complaints, although in high doses it can be an irritant to the stomach itself. This study therefore tested enteric-coated capsules as a potential treatment for irritable bowel syndrome. The results were positive, with statistically significant improvements when compared to placebo observed after 4 and 8 weeks. Another interesting find was that over 1/3 of the patients treated with placebo had an improvement in symptoms of >50%, highlighting that there is a strong psychosomatic component to this condition.

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

## Vitamin D reduces the risk of falls in nursing home residents

### The facts:

- The risk of falls in elderly nursing home residents may be reduced by adequate vitamin D supplementation.
- 124 nursing home residents (average age 89 years) were randomised to receive 1 of 4 vitamin D supplement doses (200, 400, 600 or 800 IU per day) or placebo for 5 months.
- The number and incident rate of falls was lower in patients taking vitamin D 800 IU than in those taking lower doses or placebo over the 5-month period.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Vitamin D intake is the subject of a great deal of research at the moment, one reason being that reduced levels are common in people with limited exposure to sunlight. This can have several adverse effects, particularly with respect to bone health. Falls in nursing home residents are common and often result in bone fractures, particularly of the hip. I am a little skeptical about the results from this study, because although there was a reduction in falls in those taking a dose of 800 IU, when compared to placebo, those taking 200, 400 or 600 IU had more falls than those taking placebo. Bigger and better studies are needed.

**Reference: Journal of the American Geriatrics Society February 2007, Volume 55, Pages 234-239**

## Use of herbs among adults based on evidence-based indications



### The facts:

- Almost 20% of adults participating in the 2002 National Health Interview survey (NHIS) had used a herbal supplement in the previous year.
- Of these individuals, nearly 60% used a herbal supplement appropriately to treat a specific health indication.
- Women and college-educated individuals were more likely to use herbal supplements in accordance with scientific evidence.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

These are very interesting findings from the prestigious Mayo Clinic. Around 1/5 of adults had used a herbal treatment in the previous year. More interesting was the fact that lay people are surprisingly well educated with respect to which herbal treatments have evidence to support their use for specific conditions. Females were more likely to be taking herbal treatments in accordance with evidence-based indications.

<http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.com/Abstract.asp?AID=4359&Abst=Abstract&UID>

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