











In this issue:

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Welcome to Natural Health Review Issue 27.

We have some very interesting studies again this month. A landmark paper, possibly the most important study we've ever covered in Natural Health Research Review, showed that taking 1g of omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids daily reduced the risk of death in heart failure patients by 9%. Even if only two-thirds of heart failure patients took it daily, about 10,000 lives could be saved each year in the UK alone. That's hard to argue with! On a lighter note, moderate chocolate consumption is good for heart health in middle-aged and older women, just don't get carried away. I hope you enjoy the selection this month, and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Kind Regards,

Prof Shaun Holt

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Fruit and vegetable supplement fights common cold

The facts:

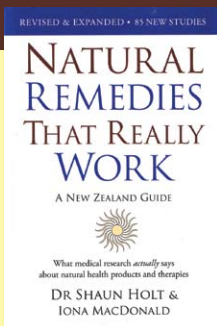
- 529 healthcare professionals from a Berlin hospital took 4 capsules of Juice Plus+® (a dietary supplement containing vitamins C and E, beta carotene and folate) or placebo every day for 6 months to evaluate the preventive effect of the supplement on common cold symptoms.
- Juice Plus+® significantly reduced the average duration of moderate or severe common cold symptoms by almost 2 days (from 9.5 days to 7.6 days).
- Daily doses of a concentrated fruit and vegetable supplement reduce the severity and duration of common cold symptoms.



Prof Shaun Holt:

There is evidence that vitamin C can prevent colds in some situations and also reduce the duration, and so it is certainly possible that a supplement from fruits and vegetables containing vitamins C and E, beta carotene and folate could have the same or even better effects. And that is exactly what this large study found ... those taking the supplement had 20% fewer days of moderate to severe cold symptoms over the 6-month study period. That's the same as around 4 days a year when you would not have to suffer symptoms of a cold, well worth having, as well as there almost certainly being other health benefits from taking the fruit and vegetable extract.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S000711451000317x>



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Selenium may reduce risk of bladder cancer

The facts:

- The results from 7 studies that looked at selenium levels and bladder cancer risk were combined to evaluate any protective effects of selenium.
- People with higher selenium levels were found to be less likely to develop bladder cancer than those with lower levels; this was especially noticeable in women.
- The results suggest that a high selenium intake may protect against bladder cancer risk, particularly in women.

Prof Shaun Holt:

Many people have low levels of the antioxidant selenium, and evidence is mounting that it may be able to prevent the onset of a number of cancers. This study adds further evidence. Lead researcher Dr Malats said that the "... results suggest a beneficial effect of high selenium intake for bladder cancer. The lower the levels of selenium, the higher the risk of developing bladder cancer". However, the researchers rightly commented that more studies are needed to show that taking selenium supplements can actually prevent cancers, as studies such as this meta-analysis only demonstrate an association and not a cause and effect relationship. <http://cebp.aacrjournals.org/content/early/2010/08/25/1055-9965.EPI-10-0544.abstract>

Calcium and vitamin D may reduce body fat in women

The facts:

- Nearly 1000 postmenopausal women took calcium (1400 or 1500 mg/day alone or with vitamin D) or placebo for 4 years to determine the effects of calcium on body composition and obesity.
- Women who took calcium gained less trunk fat and were more likely to maintain lean trunk mass over a 4-year period than those who took placebo, but no differences in BMI were observed between the 2 groups.
- Daily supplements of calcium, with or without vitamin D, may therefore reduce body fat levels and help maintain lean mass in postmenopausal women.

Prof Shaun Holt:

This is another study that has found that calcium supplements can help to counter the gradual increase in weight that often occurs as we get older. The mechanism is not known and suggested modes of action include an effect on the brain to reduce appetite and an effect on the bowel to increase the amount of fat that is excreted. Whatever the mechanism, the effect appears real and given that the WHO states that over 300 million adults are obese, cheap, effective and safe supplements will be very helpful for many. There are of course a number of other reasons to take a calcium supplement, particularly for women at risk of developing osteoporosis.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20650013>

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Smoking cannabis helps chronic nerve pain



The facts:

- 21 adults with neuropathic pain inhaled a single 25mg dose of THC (the active ingredient of cannabis) through a pipe 3 times daily for 5 days over 4 cycles to compare the effects of 3 different potencies of cannabis with placebo.
- Compared with placebo, the most potent THC dose (9.4%) caused significant reductions in pain intensity, less anxiety and depression, and better sleep.
- A single inhalation of 25mg of herbal cannabis (containing 9.4%THC) three times daily for five days reduced pain intensity and improved sleep in patients with chronic neuropathic pain.

Prof Shaun Holt:

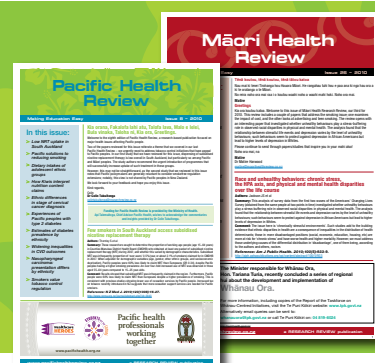
Although the best way to decide if a treatment is helpful is to look at the research findings, I cannot help but remember my experiences working in a chronic pain clinic, where many patients said that smoking cannabis was better at reducing pain than even the most potent painkillers that doctors administer. This was a small study, and only included patients with a certain type of pain, albeit a type that is very hard to treat. The results were certainly positive and larger trials will tell us more about how effective and safe cannabis smoking can be for pain. As well as the research evidence, there are also of course legal issues that will have to be considered.

<http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/abstract/cmaj.091414v1>

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Tai chi improves fibromyalgia

The facts:

- 66 patients with fibromyalgia were randomised to undergo two 60-minute sessions of either tai chi or a control intervention (wellness education and stretching) each week for 12 weeks, and were advised to practice for 20 minutes each day at home.
- The impact of fibromyalgia, assessed by the Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire score, was significantly reduced in the tai chi group compared with controls at the end of the intervention period; improvements were maintained for a further 12 weeks.
- Tai chi also improved sleep, depression, and quality of life and may therefore be a useful intervention in patients with fibromyalgia.

Prof Shaun Holt:

Fibromyalgia is very difficult to treat, and it is thought that exercise and increasing mobility can help. This study found that tai chi, which combines meditation with slow, gentle, graceful movements, as well as deep breathing and relaxation, led to significant improvements as measured by health questionnaires. The researchers concluded that "... our preliminary findings indicate that tai chi may be a useful treatment in the multidisciplinary management of fibromyalgia. Longer-term studies involving larger clinical samples are warranted to assess the generalizability of our findings and to deepen our understanding of this promising therapeutic approach".
<http://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMoa0912611>

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Eating less red meat reduces heart disease in women

The facts:

- Data for over 84,000 women followed for 26 years in the Nurses' Health Study were examined to determine the relationship between dietary protein sources and coronary heart disease.
- Higher intakes of red meat and high-fat dairy were associated with an increased risk of heart disease, whereas higher intakes of poultry, fish, and nuts were associated with lower risk.
- Substituting protein from red meat with protein from fish, poultry or nuts can reduce the risk for heart disease among women.

Prof Shaun Holt:

We know that oily fish can reduce the chances of heart disease, but what effect do other sources of protein in the diet have? This was a huge study, with data collected from more than 84,000 women over 26 years. The results suggest that changing dietary protein sources away from red meat to more poultry, fish, and nuts can reduce an individual's risk of coronary heart disease. The results were quite substantial - Substituting 1 serving per day of nuts for 1 serving of red meat was associated with a 30% decrease in the risk for coronary heart disease, and 1 additional serving of low-fat dairy, poultry or fish instead of a serving of red meat was associated with reduced rates of coronary heart disease of 13%, 19%, and 24%, respectively.

<http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/CIRCULATIONAHA.109.915165v1>

Moderate chocolate intake reduces heart failure in women

The facts:

- Data gathered over a 9-year period from the Swedish Mammography Cohort, involving over 30,000 women, were evaluated to investigate the association between chocolate intake and the risk of heart failure.
- Moderate habitual chocolate intake (1-2 servings per week) reduced the risk of hospitalisation or death from heart failure by about one-third, but higher chocolate intake was not protective.
- Moderate, but not high, consumption of chocolate reduces the risk for heart failure among middle-aged and older women.



Prof Shaun Holt:

Clinical trials have shown that chocolate intake reduces blood pressure and observational studies have found an inverse association between chocolate intake and cardiovascular disease. The aim of this study was to investigate the association between chocolate intake and incidence of heart failure. The chance of developing heart failure was 26% lower among those who consumed 1 to 3 servings of chocolate per month and 32% lower among those who consumed 1 to 2 servings per week, and the study authors concluded that a moderate intake of chocolate was indeed associated with a reduced chance of heart failure. The study participants were women, but it is likely that the findings would apply to men as well.

<http://circheartfailure.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/CIRCHEARTFAILURE.110.944025v1>

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Independent commentary by

Prof Shaun Holt,
BPharm (hons),
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Higher fish intake might reduce depression in teenage boys

The facts:

- This study examined the association between fish, omega-3 fatty acids and depression in a large group of Japanese teenagers.
- Higher fish intake and elevated omega-3 fatty acid levels were associated with fewer symptoms of depression in boys but not girls.
- Increasing the dietary intake of fish and omega-3 fatty acids may be an important strategy for the prevention of depression, particularly in teenage boys.

Prof Shaun Holt:

This important study, published in the journal *Pediatrics*, found that omega-3 fish oil intake was associated with a lower prevalence of depressive symptoms in boys but not in girls. This is consistent with previous studies in adults which have showed that omega-3 fish oil can reduce symptoms in adults with depression, even those whose symptoms are severe. However a disturbing finding from the study was just how prevalent symptoms of depression were in these Japanese 13-14 year old students - the prevalence of depressive symptoms was 22.5% for boys and 31.2% for girls.

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/126/3/e623>



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Daily fish oil could save lives

The facts:

- Almost 7,000 people with chronic heart failure took either 1g of Omacor® (a high quality fish oil supplement containing 90% omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids) or placebo daily in addition to their usual medication for 2 years to assess the effects of fish oils on death rates.
- The number of deaths fell by 9% in the fish oil group compared with the placebo group; the number of hospital admissions also fell.
- It was calculated that 56 patients with chronic heart failure would need to take Omacor® for 3.9 years to prevent one death.

Prof Shaun Holt:

This study has received enormous media attention, and rightly so, as it could well be the most important study that has been reviewed in the natural health research review. 30% of people with a diagnosis of heart failure will die in the first year after the diagnosis. This enormous trial of 1g daily of omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA) ethyl esters in almost 7000 patients with symptomatic chronic heart failure of any cause reported a 9% relative risk reduction in mortality. Lead author Professor Cowie said if two thirds of heart failure patients took the capsules daily, it would mean around 10,000 lives a year would be saved in the UK alone. This landmark paper stated that "... although not yet licensed for use in patients with chronic heart failure, it is likely that updates on international guidelines will make a recommendation to at least consider increasing omega-3 PUFA ethyl esters consumption in the form of oily fish or capsules, 1g per day, in patients with chronic heart failure already optimally medically treated".

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5083/ejcm.20424884.07>

Aged garlic extract helps lower BP in hypertensive patients

The facts:

- 50 patients with treated but uncontrolled hypertension took placebo or 4 capsules of aged garlic extract (containing 2.4mg S-allylcysteine) daily for 12 weeks in addition to their existing antihypertensive medication.
- Garlic significantly reduced systolic blood pressure over the 12-week treatment period compared with placebo in patients who had unacceptably high systolic blood pressure at the start of the study.
- Aged garlic extract was therefore superior to placebo in lowering systolic blood pressure in patients with treated but uncontrolled hypertension.

Prof Shaun Holt:

This Australian study found that those with systolic blood pressure above 140 who took four aged garlic extract capsules each day had an average systolic blood pressure 10.2mmHg lower than the control group, who took a placebo. This improvement is as good as is sometimes achieved with standard medications for high blood pressure. Lead researcher Dr. Karin Ried said that "... there is a large proportion of people out there who are on medication and some people are on four different types but they still have high blood pressure, it is uncontrolled. ... when we gave them this garlic supplement we were able on average to reduce their blood pressure under the hypertension threshold".

[http://www.maturitas.org/article/S0378-5122\(10\)00227-6/abstract](http://www.maturitas.org/article/S0378-5122(10)00227-6/abstract)

