











## In this issue:

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## Welcome to Natural Health Review Issue 23.

I hope you enjoy the interesting variety of studies highlighted this month, and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Kind Regards,

**Dr Shaun Holt**

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## Magnesium supplements reduce blood pressure

### The facts:

- 48 patients with mild uncomplicated hypertension were given either a magnesium supplement or no supplement in addition to lifestyle recommendations for 12 weeks.
- Small but significant reductions in blood pressure were observed in patients who received magnesium but not in those who didn't.
- Intracellular levels of magnesium and potassium increased in the intervention group, while intracellular calcium and sodium decreased.



### Dr Shaun Holt:

Magnesium is an essential part of the diet, with deficiency being common and a possible factor in a number of conditions including asthma and osteoporosis. Green leafy vegetables are a good source of magnesium, as are some spices, nuts, cereals, coffee, cocoa, and tea. Supplements are also available and this small study shows that they may help to bring your blood pressure down. There was an average decrease in systolic blood pressure of 5.6 mmHg... quite small, but still well worth having. The reduction was around 4 times greater than in those who just received lifestyle recommendations.

<http://www.nature.com/ajh/journal/v22/n10/abs/ajh2009126a.html>

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## Multivitamins and vitamin E reduce heart disease deaths

### The facts:

- The relationship between death and vitamin intake over a 10-year period was evaluated in almost 80,000 men and women aged 50-76 years.
- People who took multivitamin supplements 6 or 7 times a week for 10 years were found to have a 16% lower risk of cardiovascular disease than nonusers, and those who took more than 215 mg/day vitamin E over a 10-year period had a 28% lower risk.
- Neither multivitamin nor vitamin E use increased the risk of dying from cancer.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

This paper published in the important journal the American Journal of Epidemiology found that long-term regular intake of a multivitamin may reduce the risk of dying from heart disease by 16%, and regular intakes of vitamin E over the course of ten years were associated with a 28% reduction in the risk of death from cardiovascular disease. It has proven very difficult to demonstrate such benefits from multivitamins and antioxidants, as benefits may result from many years of use and it is hard to allow for confounding factors: people who take supplements are likely to lead healthier lifestyles in other ways. However, this enormous survey of nearly 80,000 people provides strong evidence in favour of taking supplements.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwp167>



## Prenatal multivitamins are beneficial

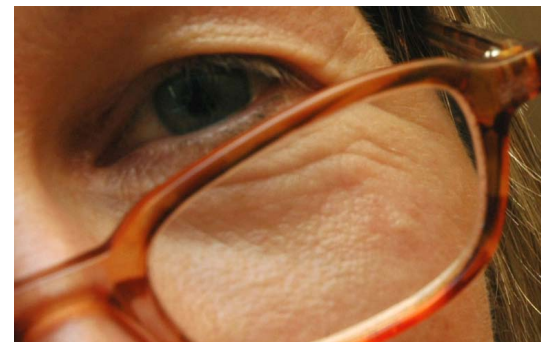
### The facts:

- The results of 15 trials were pooled to examine the effects of prenatal micronutrient intake on pregnancy outcomes.
- Babies born to women who took multimicronutrients during pregnancy were less likely to have low birthweight than those whose mothers took an iron-folic acid supplement or a placebo supplement.
- Multimicronutrient supplements had no effects on the risk of preterm birth or small-for-gestational-age babies.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Iron and folic acid supplements are currently recommended for pregnant women, and the folic acid supplement is recommended for women before they are pregnant. But what about taking other micronutrients, given that many pregnant women have nutritional deficiencies that may affect foetal growth? This review of 15 studies suggests that they are well worth taking. Study co-author Dr. Prakash Shah said: "Low birth weight and related complications are considered the most common cause of global infant mortality under the age of 5 years. With the possibility of reducing low birth weight rates by 17%, micronutrients supplementation to pregnant women, we believe, offers the highest possible return for the investment."

<http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/180/12/E99>



## Omega-3 fatty acids may protect eyesight in the elderly

### The facts:

- This study evaluated the effects of high dietary omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids in a mouse model of advanced age-related macular degeneration (AMD).
- A diet high in omega-3 fatty acids slowed the progression of retinal lesions and in some cases caused lesion reversion.
- AMD is one of the leading causes of blindness among the elderly.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

This was a study conducted in mice, so the results may not necessarily extrapolate to humans. Bearing this in mind, this study adds to the body of research emerging on the probable benefits of omega-3 fish oils in terms of maintaining eye health and, in particular, preventing age-related macular degeneration, which is one of the most common causes of blindness in the elderly. This study also demonstrated a possible mechanism of action: the mice given omega-3 had lower levels of inflammatory molecules and higher levels of anti-inflammatory molecules.

<http://ajp.amjpathol.org/cgi/content/abstract/175/2/799>

An advertisement for BNZ Partners. It features a pink pig wearing a white lab coat and holding a stethoscope. The text reads: "We'll take your business' pulse, before we prescribe." Below the pig, the logo "bnz partners" is displayed in white on a dark blue background.



## Low vitamin D is a global problem

### The facts:

- A new report issued by the International Osteoporosis Foundation has shown that populations across the globe are suffering from the impact of low vitamin D levels.
- Vitamin D status was assessed in 6 regions of the world (Asia, Europe, Middle East and Africa, Latin America, North America and Oceania); vitamin D insufficiency was found in every region studied and vitamin D deficiency was most common in South Asia and the Middle East.
- The main factors associated with lower vitamin D levels were older age, female sex, higher latitude, winter season, darker skin pigmentation, less sunlight exposure, dietary habits, and absence of vitamin D fortification.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

One of the most important findings to emerge from natural health research over the last few years has been the fact that vitamin D is very important for our health and many of us in Western countries are deficient. This deficiency is mostly a result of low exposure to sunlight, with little sun in the winter and people now covering up more in the summer, due to the risks of skin cancer. The main health problem is the increase in bone fractures occurring due to osteoporosis. The authors of this report state that given the rapidly aging population in Western countries, national strategies are needed to reduce vitamin D deficiency.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s00198-009-0954-6>



Independent  
commentary by

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## Folate reduces colorectal cancer in Korean women

### The facts:

- A hospital-based study examined the relationship between folate intake and the risk of colorectal cancer (CRC) within a Korean population.
- There was a significant relationship between higher dietary folate intake and reduced risk of CRC, colon cancer and rectal cancer in women but not in men.
- People with CRC were more likely to have a family history of CRC and drank more alcohol, smoked and did less exercise than people without CRC.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Whether or not folic acid should be required by law to be added to bread is a big issue in a number of countries at the moment. There are good reasons to do so, not least the proven reduction in certain congenital defects, but some data has emerged that it can possibly cause a small increase in chances of getting cancer. This large study from Korea further muddies the waters: increased intake of folate from the diet was found to reduce a woman's risk of colorectal cancer by about 50 per cent. And it gets more confusing: this effect was not seen in the men in the study. Many studies are needed before we will know the answer on this one, and the study has been included to demonstrate that there are often grey areas when it comes to natural health research. This author's opinion is that the benefits of folic acid almost certainly outweigh the risks for most people, but that it would be better for people to choose whether or not to take a supplement rather than have it forced upon them.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/ejcn.2009.37>

## Walnuts reduce blood fats

### The facts:

- More than 300 people participating in 13 studies ate walnut-enriched diets (10–24% of total calories) or walnut-free diets for up to 6 months to estimate any effects of the nut on blood fats.
- Walnut-enriched diets reduced total cholesterol and harmful LDL levels but did not affect beneficial HDL cholesterol levels.
- Bigger trials are needed to address the effects of walnuts on cardiovascular risk and bodyweight.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

This meta-analysis “added together” the results of 13 studies that have looked at the effects of walnut-enriched diets on blood cholesterol levels and the results were very impressive: having walnuts in the diet resulted in a significantly greater decrease in total cholesterol and in LDL-cholesterol concentrations.

According to the researchers, the study also found good evidence that walnuts “...provided significant benefits for certain antioxidant capacity and inflammatory markers and had no adverse effects on body weight”. The studies lasted between four and 24 weeks and walnuts provided between 10 and 24 per cent of total calories.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.2009.27457>



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## Cancer incidence in British vegetarians

### The facts:

- Over 60,000 people in Britain (meat eaters, fish eaters and vegetarians) were followed for over a decade to examine cancer incidence among vegetarians.
- Compared with meat eaters, the risk of stomach cancer was reduced by 71% in fish eaters and 64% in vegetarians, the risk of ovarian cancer by 63% and 31%, bladder cancer by 19% and 53%, and cancers of the lymphatic and blood tissues by 15% and 45%.
- For all cancers, fish eaters had an 18% risk reduction compared with meat eaters and vegetarians had a 12% risk reduction

### Dr Shaun Holt:

It's no surprise that a vegetarian diet reduces the risk of some cancers – we know that red meat is strongly linked to the chances of getting a number of different forms of cancer. However, some of the findings from this huge study are striking: for some cancers such as multiple myeloma, which develops from the bone marrow, vegetarians were 75 per cent less likely develop the condition. Cancers of the blood and lymph such as leukemia and non-Hodgkin lymphoma were 50 per cent less likely in vegetarians than carnivores. Overall, 33 out of a hundred meat eaters will develop some form of cancer but only 29/100 non-meat eaters will.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/sj.bjc.6605098>

Research Review acknowledges the kind support of



PHARMACY GUILD OF NEW ZEALAND (INC)

## Cocoa powder reduces blood pressure

### The facts:

- A commercial cocoa powder enriched with flavonoids (called CocioanOX) was developed and tested for a possible antihypertensive effect.
- The preparation produced a clear antihypertensive effect in rats with hypertension, similar to that seen with captopril.
- The results suggest that CocioanOX could be used as a food ingredient with potential therapeutic benefit in the prevention and treatment of hypertension.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

Another animal study, but again, one with strong findings which adds weight to the theory that antioxidant-rich chocolate is good for health, and in particular, the heart and circulatory system. Cocoa powder is rich in flavonoids and when fed to rats it reduced their blood pressure by around the same amount as a drug that is commonly used to treat people with hypertension. High blood pressure is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease which is responsible for up to half the deaths of people in Westernized countries. The effect depends on the amount of cocoa in the product ... in this study the test product had over 70% cocoa content.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1021/jf804045b>



## Dietary calcium increases fat excretion

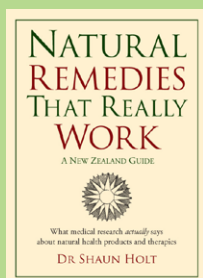
### The facts:

- A review of 13 well-controlled studies investigated the effects of dietary calcium on faecal fat excretion.
- Increasing the daily intake of dairy calcium by just over 1 g/day was found to increase fat excretion by about 5 g/day compared with a low-calcium diet.
- Dietary calcium appears to increase faecal fat excretion to an extent that could be useful in weight management.

### Dr Shaun Holt:

There is some evidence from observational studies that dietary calcium intake is inversely related to bodyweight and body fat mass ... and therefore that calcium supplements can help people to reduce weight (as well as all the other benefits). It is very helpful (but not essential) when a possible benefit such as this is unproven to know the mechanism by which it may act and this research has done just that. The review of 13 studies found that increased intakes of calcium can increase excretion of fat in the faeces, the same mechanism by which some prescription-only anti-obesity drugs work.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-789X.2009.00599.x>



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