

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH NEWS

Your Gateway to Better Health!

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10th YEAR



Editorial

Welcome to our 8th year of being on the Internet! With this issue *The AFIB Report* graduates from being an appendage to *International Health News* to being a full-fledged, independent newsletter. Please let us know if you wish to receive just *IHN*, just *The AFIB Report* or both. If we do not hear from you we will continue to send you both until the expiry of your current subscription.

More and more of our subscribers are now requesting that the monthly issues be sent as a .pdf file rather than as a simple e-mail message. If you have not yet tried the .pdf format please do so. It is much easier and more pleasant to read. Most computers now come with the Acrobat Reader needed to read .pdf files already installed. You can access the .pdf format of the November issue at www.yourhealthbase.com/november.pdf and www.yourhealthbase.com/afib.pdf.

Vitamins are much in the news these days. The US National Institutes of Health has determined that vitamin C levels tend to stabilize at a daily intake of 100 mg (50 mg taken twice daily), but that full saturation is not achieved until the daily intake reaches 400 mg/day. Other research has confirmed that vitamin C actually kills cancer cells and that alpha-lipoic acid is very effective in helping it do so. The benefits of vitamin E in preventing heart disease and stroke in very old people has been confirmed by Italian researchers and American researchers report that lycopene is effective in both the prevention and treatment of prostate cancer.

All this and more in your November issue of *IHN* - truly your gateway to better health!

Yours in health,
Hans Larsen

November Highlights

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I'm insulin resistant. Is Korean or Siberian ginseng the same as American with regard to controlling insulin and blood sugars?

JN, USA

Editor: No, all ginsengs are definitely not the same. American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) has quite different effects than does Siberian ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) and

Korean or Chinese ginseng (Panax ginseng). American ginseng is the only one that has been found to reduce postprandial glycemia.

I understand that omega-3 fatty acids are important to health and that they can be found in fish oils, flaxseed and walnut oils, etc. Are they just as good if I were to use these in recipes that are cooked? I would like to add this where I can to my family's diet, but want to make sure they are getting it in a form their bodies can utilize.

JW, USA

Editor: *I would not use flaxseed or walnut oils and certainly not fish oils in frying or baking. Any oils that contain omega-3 fatty acids in significant quantities should not be used in cooking. About the only oils that are reasonably safe for frying are olive and coconut oils, and of course, butter. They do not contain any omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3 based oils break down when heated so should be added to salads (flaxseed and walnut) or taken as a supplement (fish oil).*

ABSTRACTS

Cancer and inflammation

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM. Researchers at the University of Leicester and the St. George's Hospital Medical School have reached the conclusion that most, if not all, cancers owe their initiation and progression to a chronic inflammation. They point out that bladder cancer is associated with schistosomiasis (a parasite infection), stomach cancer with a *Helicobacter pylori* infection, liver cancer with hepatitis B or hepatitis C infection, colon cancer with chronic inflammatory bowel disease, etc. They believe the constant activation of the immune system leads to increased angiogenesis (the formation of new blood vessels), which is an essential requirement for tumour growth. They

also suggest that exposure to a cancer-causing virus is not going to cause cancer unless the host suffers from chronic inflammation and immune system activation.

The researchers conclude that it may be possible to prevent and even reverse many cancers by increasing the ratio of T-1 to T-2 helper cells and by taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and COX-2 inhibitors.

*O'Byrne, K.J. and Dalgleish, A.G. Chronic immune activation and inflammation as the cause of malignancy. **British Journal of Cancer**, Vol. 85, No. 4, August 17, 2001, pp. 473-83 [160 references]*

Fish consumption reduces lung cancer risk

NAGOYA, JAPAN. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in Japan even though the incidence and mortality is still less than two-thirds of that found in the USA and the UK. Japanese researchers have just completed a study aimed at determining the association between lung cancer and diet. Their study involved 748 men and 297 women aged 40 to 79 years who had been diagnosed with lung cancer and 2964 male and 1189 female cancer-free controls.

The researchers found that both men and women who ate cooked or raw fish five times a week or more had half the incidence of lung adenocarcinoma when compared to participants

who ate cooked or raw fish less than once a week. Women who consumed tofu (soybean curds) five times a week or more were found to have half the risk of adenocarcinomas, as compared to women who consumed tofu less than once a week. Frequent consumption of carrots was found to be beneficial for women, but detrimental for men especially smokers. Green vegetables were found to be highly beneficial for men, but not statistically so for women. There was also some evidence that increased coffee consumption is associated with an increased risk of squamous cell and small cell lung carcinomas in men. Increased consumption of dried or salted fish was not

beneficial for men or women. The researchers speculate that this is because the processing destroys the healthy omega-3 oils (eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid) present in raw and cooked fish.

Takezaki, T., et al. Dietary factors and lung cancer risk in Japanese with special reference to fish consumption and adenocarcinomas. British Journal of Cancer, Vol. 84, No. 9, May 4, 2001, pp. 1199-1206

Recommended vitamin C intake increased

BETHESDA, MARYLAND. The Food and Nutrition Board of the US National Academy of Sciences recently issued new Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) for vitamin C. The RDA for men and women (USA and Canada) is now 90 mg/day and 75 mg/day respectively. In Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Japan the RDA is now 100 mg/day for both men and women and in France it is 110 mg/day for both. The RDA for women in the USA was not actually determined by experiment (as it was for men), but was merely based on the difference in average body weight between the two sexes. Researchers at the National Institutes of Health now recommend that the RDA for healthy young women be increased to 90 mg/day. This recommendation follows a comprehensive depletion/repletion study involving 15 healthy young women who were hospitalized for six months in a dietary ward. The researchers

found that vitamin C concentrations in blood plasma, lymphocytes, platelets, monocytes, and neutrophils tended to stabilize at vitamin C intakes of 100 mg/day (50 mg taken twice daily at least two hours before breakfast and dinner). Plasma and circulating cells become saturated at daily vitamin C intakes of 400 mg/day. Higher dosages resulted in increased excretion in the urine. The researchers emphasize that their findings only apply to healthy young women and that optimum vitamin C intakes could be quite different for patients with diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol levels, kidney failure or heart disease.

Levine, Mark, et al. A new recommended dietary allowance for vitamin C for healthy young women. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Vol. 98, No. 17, August 14, 2001, pp. 9842-46

Lipoic acid: A new cancer fighter?

WICHITA, KANSAS. *We do not usually report the results of test tube experiments, but found this research so fascinating that we decided to make an exception.*

Several studies have shown that intravenous infusions of vitamin C (ascorbic acid) can increase survival times among terminal cancer patients. Researchers at the Bio-Communications Research Institute now report on a test tube experiment designed to see if vitamin C actually kills cancer cells *in vitro*. SW620 human colon cancer cells were grown in cell cultures and then exposed to various concentrations of vitamin C solutions. A two-day treatment with vitamin C at a concentration of 33.7 mM killed 75 per cent of all cancer cells while a concentration of about 10 mM (200 mg/dL) killed about 50 per cent. Unfortunately, even infusions of up to 60 grams of vitamin C

solution in a human volunteer did not result in a comparable level (10 mM) in blood plasma.

The researchers conclude that it may not be possible to kill enough cancer cells by vitamin C infusion. However, they discovered that vitamin K and, in particular, lipoic acid were highly efficient in killing colon cancer cells. Using a 10:1 ratio of vitamin C to lipoic acid had a synergistic effect and this mixture killed 50 per cent of all cancer cells at a concentration of only 4.5 mM. The researchers conclude that it would be feasible to obtain this concentration by intravenous infusion and urge further work to investigate the use of a combination of vitamin C and lipoic acid as an anti-cancer agent in humans.

Casciari, J.J., et al. Cytotoxicity of ascorbate, lipoic acid, and other antioxidants in hollow fibre in vitro tumours. British Journal of Cancer, Vol. 84, No. 11, June 1, 2001, pp. 1544-50

Fish oil versus flax oil

BETHESDA, MARYLAND. There is considerable evidence that fish and fish oils are beneficial to heart health, reduce the risk of cancer, and benefit mental health. The “active” components of fish oils are eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), a polyunsaturated fatty acid with 20 carbon atoms in its backbone, and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), a polyunsaturated fatty acid with 22 carbon atoms. Both are members of the omega-3 group of essential fatty acids. EPA and DHA are found exclusively in marine animals; fatty fish such as herring, sardines, salmon and fresh tuna are the best sources.

Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) is another omega-3 fatty acid found in flaxseed and flaxseed oil. ALA has 18 carbon atoms in its backbone and can be converted to EPA in the body (in the liver) by the addition of two carbon atoms. EPA, in turn, can be converted to DHA. Because the typical American diet is relatively low in fish intake ALA becomes a crucial source of the EPA and DHA required for optimum health.

Researchers at the National Institutes of Health have just completed a study designed to determine just how much ALA is actually converted to EPA in the body. Their study included eight healthy subjects who were fed a

standard diet for three weeks and then given one gram of ALA labeled with an isotope tracer. The diet was beef-based in order to avoid extraneous sources of EPA and DHA. The researchers measured blood plasma concentrations of ALA, EPA and DHA 8, 24, 48, 72, 96 and 168 hours after ingestion of the labeled ALA.

The results show that only about 0.2 per cent of the ALA (2 mg) was actually converted to EPA. In contrast, about 23 per cent of the EPA was available for conversion to DHA. The researchers also noted that the half-life (the time it takes to reduce initial concentration by 50 per cent) of ALA in blood plasma was quite low at about one hour. In comparison, the half-life of EPA was 67 hours and that of DHA 20 hours.

The researchers conclude that ALA is not a viable source of EPA and DHA and cannot replace fish and fish oils in the diet. **Editor's Note:** According to this new data a tablespoon of flax oil would only result in the synthesis of about 30 mg of EPA – far less than the recommended daily intake of 220 mg.

Pawlosky, Robert J. Physiological compartmental analysis of alpha-linolenic acid metabolism in adult humans. Journal of Lipid Research, Vol. 42, August 2001, pp. 1257-65

Stroke patients may be better off at home

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM. One-fifth of all hospital beds in the UK are taken up by stroke patients. Researchers at the Guy's Hospital School of Medicine now report that most stroke patients may actually be better off recovering at home. Their study involved 975 patients with a first stroke. Most (812) of those patients were admitted to hospital for treatment, but 163 stayed in their community and received care there. Three months after experiencing the stroke 30 per cent of the patients had died. The mortality rate among patients treated in hospital was 35 per cent as compared to only 8 per cent among those treated in the community. Only 47 per cent of the hospital-treated patients had returned to independent living three months after their stroke whereas 72 per cent of community-treated ones had done so. All told, the risk of

dying or not returning to independent living was about twice as high among hospitalized patients as among those treated in the community; this held true even after adjusting for age, sex, ethnicity, atrial fibrillation, prior heart attack, independence in living prior to stroke, type of stroke, and clinical indicators for stroke severity. The researchers are puzzled by their findings, but point out, “some hospital-based treatments are delivered haphazardly in the UK with no evidence for their use.” They also suggest that inadequate nutrition and hydration, and hospital-acquired infections could help explain the increased mortality among hospital-admitted patients.

Bhalla, Ajay, et al. Does admission to hospital improve the outcome for stroke patients? Age and Ageing, Vol. 30, May 2001, pp. 197-203

Obesity and exercise

KYOTO, JAPAN. Obesity is becoming increasingly common in developed countries and is associated with an increased risk of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and other chronic diseases. A low heart rate variability (HRV) is associated with an increased risk of sudden death and is a common feature in obese individuals. HRV is a measure of the variation in the time interval between individual heartbeats. It has two main components, a low frequency component (less than 0.15 Hz) which is primarily an indication of the activity of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and a high frequency component (greater than 0.15 Hz), which is an indication of the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS).

Researchers at Kyoto University now report that regular aerobic exercise not only reduces body mass index (a measure of obesity) and improves lung function, but also produces a significant increase in HRV. Their experiment involved 18 obese middle-aged men and women with an average body mass index (BMI) of 27.3. Obesity is defined as a BMI over 25. The study participants underwent a 12-week aerobic exercise program consisting of three weekly

sessions of 30-minute exercise on a stationary bicycle. At the end of the program the average BMI had dropped to 25.9, aerobic capacity had improved significantly, and HRV (total power) had increased from 459 to 1042 ms² (milliseconds squared). The low frequency component (SNS) increased from 349 to 695 ms², and the high frequency component (PNS) from 146 to 348 ms².

The researchers believe that it is the increase in sympathetic (adrenergic) activity that is primarily responsible for the weight loss. Increased sympathetic activity can also be induced by exposure to cold and by ingestion of capsaicin (hot peppers). Capsaicin is known to increase energy metabolism through the release of neurotransmitters (catecholamines) that activate the SNS. The researchers conclude that regular aerobic exercise benefits obese individuals through weight loss, improved lung function, and a beneficial increase in heart rate variability.

*Amano, Masari, et al. Exercise training and autonomic nervous system activity in obese individuals. **Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise**, Vol. 33, August 2001, pp. 1287-91*

Prostate cancer and lycopene

DETROIT, MICHIGAN. Epidemiological studies have shown that a high intake of tomatoes markedly reduces the risk of prostate cancer. It is believed that this beneficial effect is due to lycopene, the most common carotenoid in tomatoes. A team of researchers from Wayne State University, McGill University, University of Maryland, and the University of Hawaii has just concluded a clinical trial aimed at evaluating the benefits of lycopene supplementation in prostate cancer patients. The study included 26 men with clinically localized prostate cancer who were scheduled to undergo radical prostatectomy (removal of the prostate gland). The men were randomized into a control group and an intervention group. The intervention group received one 15-mg lycopene capsule with breakfast and dinner for three weeks prior to surgery. Blood samples were taken before the start of supplementation and three weeks later just before surgery. The removed tumors and surrounding tissue were examined by pathologists.

The researchers conclude that lycopene supplementation lowers PSA levels; they observed an average 18 per cent decrease in the lycopene group as compared to a 14 per cent increase in the control group. The level of the tumor suppressing protein Cx43 in the malignant part of the tumor was found to be substantially higher in the lycopene group. It was also apparent that tumors tended to be smaller and more sharply defined (less encroachment into surrounding healthy tissue) in the lycopene group. No adverse effects of the lycopene supplementation were reported by the patients or their physicians. The researchers conclude that lycopene is likely to be beneficial for both prevention and treatment of prostate cancer, but urge larger trials to confirm this.

*Kucuk, Omer, et al. Phase II randomized clinical trial of lycopene supplementation before radical prostatectomy. **Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention**, Vol. 10, August 2001, pp. 861-68 [72 references]*

Chinese herb proven in arthritis therapy

DALLAS, TEXAS. A team of researchers from the University of Texas and the National Institutes of Health reports that an extract of the Chinese herbal remedy *Tripterygium wilfordii* Hook F (TWHF) has proven effective in the treatment of severe rheumatoid arthritis. TWHF has been used for centuries in China to treat rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, psoriasis, and IgA nephropathy. Preliminary studies in animals have shown that TWHF extracts have anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressive effects comparable to those of prednisone.

The researchers prepared their extract by extracting finely ground powder obtained from peeled TWHF roots with ethanol (alcohol) and ethyl acetate. The ethyl acetate extract was dried and put in capsules each containing 30 mg of the extract yielding a total of 9.9 micrograms of the active components triptolide and triptolidide.

Thirteen patients with long standing rheumatoid arthritis participated in the trial. The initial dosage was 30 mg/day; this was gradually increased to 570 mg/day over a 12-18 month

period. Nine of the patients went through the whole program. The patients all experienced marked improvement and one went into complete remission on a dose of 390 mg/day. Morning stiffness was the first symptom to improve. At baseline it lasted an average of 265 minutes. On a dose of 390 mg/day it reduced to 10 minutes. ESR (erythrocyte sedimentation rate) went from 55 mm/hour to 22 mm/hour on a dose of 480 mg/day. Sixty per cent of the patients experienced significant (more than 20 per cent) improvement on a dose of 180 mg/day. A dose of 300-480 mg/day was required for maximum benefit. This is comparable to the dosages used in China and was found to be entirely safe. The researchers are currently conducting a much larger, double-blind, controlled study to confirm the benefits of TWHF extracts.

Tao, Xuelian, et al. A phase I study of ethyl acetate extract of the Chinese antirheumatic herb Tripterygium wilfordii Hook F in rheumatoid arthritis. Journal of Rheumatology, Vol. 28, October 2001, pp. 2160-67

Breast cancer and electromagnetic radiation

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON. Several studies have found a correlation between low nighttime melatonin levels and the risk of breast cancer. It is believed that low melatonin levels stimulate the pineal gland to call for the production of more estrogen, a significant risk factor for breast cancer.

Researchers at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Institute now report that nighttime exposure to electromagnetic fields commonly found in the home (60 Hz) can suppress melatonin production. The study involved 200 women aged 20 to 74 years with no history of breast cancer. The women participated in two 72-hour trials over a span of 6 to 12 months (to include the variable of seasonal change in the number of hours of darkness). The researchers measured the levels of light and electromagnetic radiation in the women's bedrooms during the night, tested urine samples for the level of 6-sulfatoxymelatonin (the major metabolite of

melatonin), and conducted interviews to determine alcohol usage, smoking status and use of medications.

The researchers conclude that exposure to higher magnetic fields during the night is associated with a significant decrease in melatonin production. Melatonin production was also highly dependent on the number of hours of darkness (the more dark hours the more melatonin is produced). Increasing age and alcohol consumption was also associated with reduced melatonin production as was the use of certain classes of medications (beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers and psychotropics). NOTE: This study was partially funded by the Electric Power Research Institute.

Davis, Scott, et al. Residential magnetic fields, light-at-night, and nocturnal urinary 6-sulfatoxymelatonin concentration in women. American Journal of Epidemiology, Vol. 154, October 1, 2001, pp. 591-600

Vitamin E protects against heart disease

FERRARA, ITALY. A group of Italian researchers has concluded that a high blood level of vitamin E is highly protective against heart attacks, strokes, and congestive heart failure in people aged 80 years and older. Their study included 54 healthy men and 48 healthy women with an average age of 84 years. The participants underwent a complete clinical examination and had blood samples drawn for analysis of antioxidants (vitamin C, vitamin E and beta-carotene), cholesterol and fluorescent products of lipid peroxidation (FPLPs). FPLPs are a marker of oxidative stress. After four years of follow-up 16 of the participants had suffered a stroke, 12 a heart attack, and 4 had developed congestive heart failure. The researchers concluded that participants with the highest blood plasma levels of vitamin E (greater

than 43.9 micromol/L) had a 10 times lower risk (after adjustment for other risk factors) of experiencing a cardiac event than did participants with low levels of vitamin E (less than 23 micromol/L). A high level of FPLPs in the blood plasma was associated with a seven-fold increase in risk when compared to a low level. Blood levels of vitamin C, cholesterol and beta-carotene were not related to the risk of having a cardiac event. This confirms previous research that elevated cholesterol levels are not a risk factor for heart disease in very old people. *Mezzetti, Andrea, et al. Vitamin E and lipid peroxide plasma levels predict the risk of cardiovascular events in a group of healthy very old people. Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, Vol. 49, May 2001, pp. 533-37*

Calcium and prostate cancer

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS. Several studies have found that a high intake of calcium from dairy products increases the risk of prostate cancer. Other studies have found no such correlation. Now researchers at the Harvard Medical School weigh in with the results of a major study that confirms the correlation. The study involved 20,885 male American physicians who were enrolled in 1984. During 11 years of follow-up 1012 of the men developed prostate cancer including 411 cases of advanced prostate cancer. The physicians completed food frequency questionnaires to determine their intake of calcium-containing dairy products (whole milk, skim milk, cheese and ice cream). About 57 per cent of the calcium obtained from dairy products originated from skim milk which contains 307 mg of calcium per serving (8 oz glass). A thorough statistical analysis of the

data collected showed that men who consumed more than 600 mg/day of calcium (equivalent to two glasses of skim milk) had a 32 per cent greater risk of developing prostate cancer, after adjusting for other potential risk factors, than did men who consumed 150 mg/day of calcium or less.

The researchers believe that a high intake of calcium suppresses the synthesis of 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D-3, an important hormone believed to be protective against prostate cancer. They point out that another large study found that calcium from supplements also increases prostate cancer risk.

Chan, June M., et al. Dairy products, calcium, and prostate cancer risk in the Physicians' Health Study. American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Vol. 74, October 2001, pp. 549-54

NEWSBRIEFS

Detergents effective in allergen removal. Australian researchers have evaluated the ability of common laundry detergents to remove cat allergen (Fel d 1) and house dust mite allergen (Der p 1). They conclude that all of the 11 laundry detergents tested are effective in removing both cat and mite allergens from bed

linen within the first five minutes of laundering in a washing machine at 25 degrees C. Higher temperatures removed slightly more allergens. Water alone or soap and water were not as effective as the detergents and enzyme-containing detergents were no more effective than regular ones.

Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Vol. 108, September 2001, pp. 369-74

Acuband reduces motion sickness.

Acupressure of the Neiguan or P6 point has been used for centuries in China to treat nausea and vomiting. P6 is located two fingers' width above the crease of the wrist between the two bones of the forearm on the palm-side of the arm. Researchers at the Pennsylvania State University now report that Acuband, a commercially available magnetic, acupressure wristband, is highly effective in reducing motion sickness and nausea. The Acuband is worn on the wrist so as to automatically put pressure on the P6 point.

Altern Ther Health Med, Vol. 7, No. 4, July 2001, pp. 91-94

Lycopene protects against stroke and heart attack.

Finnish researchers have discovered that middle-aged men with low blood serum levels of lycopene (less than 0.07 micromol/L) have a 3.3-fold greater risk of suffering a stroke or heart attack than do men with higher levels. The study involved 725 men previously free of stroke and cardiovascular disease. Other research has shown that beta-carotene protects male smokers against stroke. Tomatoes and tomato products are an excellent source of lycopene.

British Journal of Nutrition, Vol. 85, June 2001, pp. 749-54

Stroke, Vol. 31, October 2000, pp. 2301-06

Kidney disease and fruit juices.

Research has shown that consumption of potassium-rich fruit juices can reduce the risk of stroke and high

blood pressure. British medical doctors now warn that fruit juices can cause problems for diabetics, people with end-stage kidney disease, and people taking angiotensin-converting-enzyme (ACE) inhibitors. Fruit juices especially noni juice, orange juice and tomato juice are very high in potassium and excessive consumption can cause hyperkalemia (high blood levels of potassium) in susceptible people. *The Lancet, Vol. 358, September 8, 2001, pp. 841-42*

Neuroblastoma and parental occupation.

A team of American and Canadian researchers has discovered that the risk of neuroblastoma (a cancer involving the nervous system) in children may be related to their father's occupation. The researchers found that children born to fathers who had been regularly exposed to turpentine had a 10-fold increased risk of neuroblastoma. Paternal exposure to diesel fuel, lacquer thinner, wood dust, and solders were also significant risk factors for the development of neuroblastoma in offspring. Maternal exposure to chemicals was not associated with an increased risk.

American Journal of Epidemiology, Vol. 154, July 15, 2001, pp. 106-14

Longevity and the thymus gland.

The thymus gland is an important part of the immune system. Unfortunately, it shrinks with age thereby reducing the number of infection-fighting T-cells. British researchers now report that women have higher levels of T-cells than do men of the same age. They believe that the resulting stronger immune system is one of the main reasons why women tend to live longer.

New Scientist, September 15, 2001, p. 14

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