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**Women, Men and Healthy Circulation**

Multivitamins and other nutrients protect blood vessels

Multivitamin/minerals and garlic lowered blood pressure, magnesium reduced stroke, and selenium extended life in cardiovascular disease, in four new studies.

In a women’s study, over 100 obese women with high blood pressure, blood sugar and fats, average age 42, took a daily high-dose or low-dose multivitamin/mineral, a calcium supplement, or a placebo. After 26 weeks, compared to the placebo and calcium groups, both multivitamin groups had much lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure. C-reactive protein, a sign of the inflammation that can lead to heart and other diseases, was lower as well.

In a study of stroke, researchers measured magnesium in the diets and blood of over 14,000 men and women, aged 45 to 64, and followed up for 15 years. At the start of the study, those with normal levels of magnesium were less likely to have high blood pressure or diabetes. Over 15 years, those with high blood pressure and diabetes were most likely to have a stroke. Doctors suspect a link between low magnesium levels, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke.

In a selenium study, doctors measured selenium levels in over 1,700 participants with chest pain from cardiovascular disease. After six years of follow up, doctors found that selenium levels were lower in those who had died from a heart attack compared to those who lived, and that those with the highest selenium levels were 62 percent less likely to die from cardiovascular disease compared to those with the lowest selenium levels.

In a men’s study, 84 men with mild or moderately high blood pressure took 600 mg of timed-release garlic powder tablets per day, or a placebo. After eight weeks, there was no change for placebo, but in the garlic group, systolic and diastolic blood pressure declined by 7.0 and 3.8 mmHg, respectively.

**APRIL’S Healthy Insight**

**Carbs for Smiles**

In a diet and mood study, more than 100 overweight or obese participants, average age 50, ate a low-calorie diet containing low carbohydrates and high fats, or high carbohydrates and low fats. Total calories were similar. After one year, both groups had lost about 30 pounds. For the first eight weeks, mood and sense of well being improved in both groups, but over the year, mood in the low-carbohydrate/high-fat group returned to starting levels. Researchers think a low carbohydrate diet may harm mood and negate good effects from losing weight. Mood in the high-carbohydrate/low-fat group stayed high throughout the year.

**Reference:** Archives of Internal Medicine; 2009, Vol. 169, No. 20, 1873-80

**This Issue**

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**Hot Flash News**

Herbs improve quality of life in women

Saint John’s wort alone or with black cohosh or chasteberry reduced hot flashes, improved sleep and quality of life, relieved symptoms of PMS, and improved mood in menopausal and perimenopausal women, in four new studies.

In a hot flash study, 100 menopausal women, average age 50, took a St. John’s wort liquid extract three times per day, or a placebo. At the start of the study, the women were experiencing about four hot flashes per day. After eight weeks, women in the St. John’s wort group were experiencing about 27 percent fewer hot flashes per day compared to placebo.

In another hot flash study, 47 perimenopausal women, aged 40 to 65, with at least three hot flashes per day, took 900 mg of St. John’s wort alcohol extract three times per day, or a placebo. After three months, women in the St. John’s wort group had fewer hot flashes, improved quality of life for menopause symptoms, and fewer sleep problems compared to placebo.

In a premenstrual syndrome (PMS) study, 16 perimenopausal women with irregular menses and PMS symptoms took 1,800 mg of St. John’s wort tablets three times per day, plus a 1,000 mg tablet of chasteberry extract per day, or a placebo. Compared to placebo, women who took St. John’s wort with chasteberry had far fewer PMS-like symptoms overall and those who had reported depression or food cravings also improved.

In a mood study, over 6,000 menopausal women took black cohosh with or without St. John’s wort. Researchers followed the women for six to 12 months to evaluate symptoms such as hot flashes, heart palpitations, insomnia, anxiety, depression, and irritability. Both groups improved in all areas, but mood improved most in women who took black cohosh and St. John’s wort together.

**Feeling Better with Age**

B vitamins, vitamin D and omega-3s improve quality of life in aging

Folate and vitamins B6, B12, and omega-3s may curb depression, folate reduced falls and vitamin D improved balance, and folate and folic acid protected against Alzheimer’s disease, several new studies reveal.

Doctors in a depression study measured folate and vitamin B12 levels in 669 adults, aged at least 55. Although everyone had normal folate levels, those with more folate were much less likely to be depressed than those with less folate. Also, those with normal vitamin B12 levels were less likely to have depressive symptoms than those deficient in vitamin B12.

In a discussion of mood and vitamin deficiency, doctors explained that folate, folic acid, vitamins B6 and B12 help form serotonin, a brain chemical that helps regulate mood. When these nutrients are deficient, homocysteine, a sign of inflammation, increases, and researchers noted that about half of those with depression have high homocysteine levels. The scientists also said that omega-3 fatty acids help protect nerve coverings and believe that it is important to correct deficiencies in these nutrients to maintain nervous system health.

In a study of balance and falls, researchers measured serum folate levels in 54 men and women, aged 65 to 91, and found that as levels of folate increased, the number of falls in the past year decreased. Doctors also found that those with higher vitamin D levels had better balance, stood up and walked faster, and had more strength and range of motion than those with lower vitamin D levels.

In an Alzheimer’s disease (AD) study, researchers measured folate levels in about 1,000 men and women, average age 76, and followed up for seven years. Those who got folate from diet and folic acid supplements together were least likely to have AD, and as their total folate levels increased, chances for AD decreased.

**Reference:** *Menopause; November, 2009, Electronic Prepublication*
Better Movement

Glucosamine and omega-3s eased pain in osteoarthritis (OA), silymarin cut inflammation in OA better than non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS), and doctors discover how omega-3s lower inflammation, in three new studies.

In an OA study, 177 people with moderate to severe OA of the hip or knee took 1,500 mg of glucosamine per day with or without 444 mg of fish oil containing 200 mg of omega-3 fatty acids. After six months, 44 percent of the glucosamine/omega-3 group and 32 percent of the glucosamine-only group reported 80 percent less pain. More than nine in 10 overall reported at least 20 percent less pain. In addition, the glucosamine/omega-3 group reported much less morning stiffness and pain in the hips and knees compared to the glucosamine-only group. Doctors noted both supplements were very safe during the long-term treatment period of 26 weeks.

In a knee OA study, doctors compared the anti-inflammatory herb silymarin—from the flowering milk thistle plant—to two NSAIDS in 220 people with painful knee OA. Participants took 300 mg of silymarin per day alone or with 15 mg of Meloxicam or 20 mg of Piroxicam, or took Meloxicam or Piroxicam alone. After eight weeks, silymarin reduced signs of the inflammation that leads to bone-joint deterioration better than any of the other treatments, without side effects.

In an omega-3 study published in the journal Nature, doctors wanted to find out why omega-3 fish oil reduces inflammation. Researchers discovered that the body converts an omega-3 fatty acid in fish oil, docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), into a chemical called ResolvinD2. Doctors now know the exact chemical structure of ResolvinD2 and hope that their new understanding will lead to more effective treatments for inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Reference: Advances in Therapy; 2009, Vol. 26, No. 9, 858-71

Avoiding Allergies in Kids

Nutrients reduce allergy and strengthen immunity in kids

Kids whose moms took omega-3s had less allergy, kids who took multivitamins before age four avoided allergy, and kids who took probiotics had stronger immune defenses, three new studies reveal.

In an omega-3 study, 145 pregnant women with allergies, or whose husbands or previous children had allergies, took 1,600 mg of eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) plus 1,100 mg of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) per day, or a placebo. The women started taking the omega-3s at 25 weeks pregnant and continued through the fourth month of nursing. Two percent of kids whose moms took the omega-3s had food allergy compared to 15 percent of those whose moms took the placebo. The researchers also measured eczema—dry, itchy skin rash—and found that 8 percent of kids whose moms took omega-3s had eczema compared to 24 percent for placebo.

In a multivitamin study, parents gave researchers lifestyle information for more than 2,400 8-year-olds including vitamin supplements, environmental exposures, and symptoms and diagnoses of allergic diseases. Kids who began taking multivitamins before the age of four were 39 percent less likely to have food allergy and allergic runny nose compared to kids who started taking multivitamins later in life or who did not take multivitamins.

Doctors in a probiotics study explained that during the first year of life, infants need communities of friendly microorganisms in the intestine to develop a strong and balanced immune response and that, without these healthy living colonies, kids are much more likely to develop asthma and allergy. Researchers analyzed stool samples from six-month-olds who took Lactobacillus casei or a placebo and found that the probiotics group had a greater number and variety of probiotics species. Doctors said these friendly colonies create a stable environment in the intestines that promotes a strong immune response and helps resist disease.

Reference: Acta Paediatrica; 2009, Vol. 98, No. 9, 1461-7
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Home Comfort Compote

Let this delicious, nutritious dish put a smile on your face and please see page 1 for new research on how a high-carbohydrate, low-fat diet improved mood.

**Ingredients:**
1 c mixed dried fruit pieces  
1 c orange juice  
1 tsp lemon juice  
1 tbsp honey or maple syrup  
1 c water

½ c millet  
½ c assorted nuts and seeds, chopped  
Plain yogurt  
Optional: fresh grated ginger

**Directions:** Simmer dried fruit in small saucepan with orange juice, lemon juice, and honey for five minutes. Remove fruit with a slotted spoon while continuing to cook sauce, reducing it to about half in volume. Return fruit to sauce and, while sauce is simmering, bring water to a boil in medium sauce pan. Add millet and bring back to a boil. Cover, and turn heat to low. Cook about 15 minutes or until the liquid is absorbed and the millet is tender. Stir in chopped nuts and seeds. Serve by topping with the stewed fruit, yogurt and grated ginger.