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Natural Insights for Well Being™

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Lifelong Probiotics

Nutrition scientists are focusing on probiotics, the beneficial bacteria that can improve digestion and fight disease in young and old.

In a colic study, 90 breastfed colicky babies took probiotics or 60 mg of the drug simethicone while their moms didn't eat dairy products. After 28 days, the probiotic *Lactobacillus reuteri* reduced baby crying time 74 percent compared to 26 percent for simethicone. Doctors believe probiotics reduced intestinal inflammation.

In a chronic constipation study of 45 kids under age 10, those who took *Lactobacillus casei rhamnosus* had less abdominal pain than those who took a magnesium oxide laxative. Doses were twice per day for four weeks. Probiotics increased bowel movements, reduced hard stools, and cut the need for glycerin enemas as effectively as magnesium oxide. In a related four-week study, *Lactobacilli* and *bifidobacteria* significantly increased bowel movements in 20 constipated children aged 4 to 16, and reduced bowel incontinence and abdominal pain without side effects. There was no placebo group.

In a cold study, about 480 healthy adults took vitamins and minerals with or without *Lactobacilli* and *bifidobacteria* over two winters for a total of eight months. About the same number in each group caught cold, but colds



averaged two days less for those who took probiotics compared to those who did not.

In a study of fats, researchers noted that this is the first trial in humans to measure how probiotics may lower risk for blood vessel and heart disease. Among 26 healthy adults, average age 42, those who took *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* for three weeks had fewer toxic and inflammatory blood fats compared to placebo.

In a mouth bacteria study, doctors wanted to see if probiotics could reduce the bacteria in saliva that can cause tooth decay. Two dozen healthy participants, average age 20, ate about two ounces of ice cream per day, made with or without *Bifidobacterium lactis*, for two 10-day cycles. After each cycle, those who ate the probiotics ice cream had significantly less of the acid-forming bacteria compared to the start of the study.

REFERENCE: WORLD JOURNAL OF GASTROENTEROLOGY; 2008, VOL. 14, No. 20, 3188-94

FEBRUARY'S

Women's Health

Vitamin D for Breast Cancer

New research shows that three in four women with breast cancer have low levels of vitamin D. Researchers measured blood levels of vitamin D in about 800 women who had survived breast cancer. Hispanics had the lowest levels of vitamin D, followed by African-Americans and non-Hispanic Caucasians. Just 25 percent took any kind of vitamin supplement with vitamin D. Doctors said, "Vitamin D influences pathways related to [cancer]... and vitamin D therapy could be a useful, cost-effective treatment for breast cancer patients. Clinicians may want to consider testing their patients for serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D and offer recommendations to improve vitamin D status."

REFERENCE: AMERICAN JOURNAL OF CLINICAL NUTRITION; 2008, VOL. 88, No. 1, 133-9

This Issue

VITAMIN E LOWERS THE RISK OF CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME	2
OMEGA-3 HELPED SATISFY DIETERS' HUNGER AND CUT FATS	2
POTASSIUM, MAGNESIUM, CALCIUM, OLIVE LEAF CUT BLOOD PRESSURE	3
NUTRIENTS LOWERED RISK FOR HEART DISEASE IN DIABETICS	3
CALCIUM IS A KEY TO HEALTHY WEIGHT	4

Living Longer and Better with Vitamin E

Those with higher levels of the antioxidant vitamin E were less likely to have chronic fatigue syndrome or to lose physical ability, and taking vitamin E helped those with Alzheimer's disease live longer, according to findings from three new studies.

In a chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) study, researchers found that blood levels of vitamin E were significantly lower in 50 participants with CFS than in 40 participants without CFS. Doctors suggested that those with CFS have more cell damage because of low vitamin E levels.

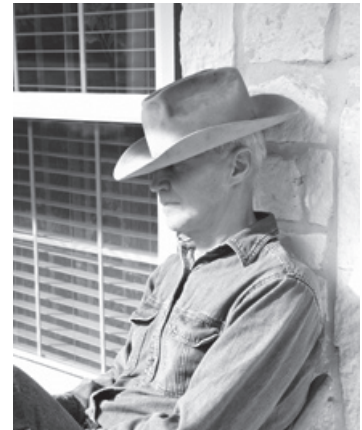
In a study of physical ability, doctors explained that there is too little research on how poor nutrition may impair physical ability in older adults and that helping elders live independently longer should be a public-health priority. Scientists randomly selected about 700 men and women, aged 65 or older, measured blood levels of vitamins and minerals, and followed up for three years. Researchers tested how fast participants could walk, how many times they could get up out of a

chair, and how well they could balance in increasingly difficult postures. After adjusting for age, lifestyle, and other factors, researchers found that those whose physical ability declined the most over the three-year period had the lowest levels of vitamin E. In explaining the physical decline, doctors said that low vitamin E levels may increase oxidative stress, damaging muscles and DNA; accelerate hardening of the arteries, and injure nerves.

In an Alzheimer's disease (AD) study, researchers followed about 850 men and women with AD, average age 74, for five years. During that time, those who took 1,000 IU of vitamin E twice per day were 26 percent less likely to die from any cause compared to those who did not take vitamin E. Study authors said, "Vitamin E

appears to increase survival time of Alzheimer's patients," noting that, "This is particularly important because recent studies in heart disease patients have questioned whether vitamin E is beneficial for survival."

REFERENCE: JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION; 2008, VOL. 299, NO. 3, 308-15



Dieting Successfully

Dieters who ate omega-3 fatty acids from fish oils or fish had less hunger, lower cholesterol and fats, and managed blood sugar better, three new studies reveal.

In an appetite study, researchers theorized that omega-3 fatty acids could help dieters feel satisfied after eating. About 230 overweight or obese participants took a low dose of less than 260 mg of omega-3 or a high dose of more than 1,300 mg of omega-3 per day while on a balanced but low-

calorie diet for eight weeks. In the last two weeks of the study, participants ate a test dinner of either low or high amounts of omega-3 while researchers measured sensations of hunger immediately afterward and again two hours later. Those who ate the high-omega-3 meal felt less hunger and more full immediately after and two hours after the meal than those who ate the low-omega-3 meal. Doctors concluded that omega-3s helps control feelings of hunger.

In a study of blood fats, about 320 overweight or obese participants aged 20 to 40 ate a balanced low-calorie diet. Two groups ate less than 260 mg of omega-3 per day including lean codfish or placebo oil capsules while

two other groups ate more than 1,300 mg of omega-3 per day consisting of fatty salmon or fish oil capsules. After eight weeks, researchers discovered that all types of fish and fish oil reduced total cholesterol and overall blood fats, and both salmon and fish oil preserved HDL, the "good" cholesterol.

In a related study using the same group of participants as in the blood fats study, researchers found that those who ate omega-3s while dieting had healthier levels of insulin on an empty stomach and were more sensitive to insulin after eight weeks. Insulin helps the body convert blood sugar (glucose) into energy.

REFERENCE: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF OBESITY; 2008, VOL. 32, NO. 7, 1105-12



Taming High Blood Pressure with Diet

Potassium, magnesium, calcium, and olive leaf extract help lower high blood pressure safely and as effectively as drug treatments, reducing risk for heart disease and stroke.

In a diet study, researchers explained that because high blood pressure remains widespread, diet may be a better approach to lowering blood pressure than drugs. Scientists reviewed the entire medical literature for studies on potassium, magnesium, and calcium and found that these nutrients all help lower high blood pressure. The doctors said that for potassium in particular, there is a consistent body of clinical evidence showing that those with high potassium levels have lower blood pressure. Study authors concluded that Americans consume too little potassium—about half the amount—and about twice as much salt (sodium) as they should. The U.S. Institute of Medicine and the American Heart Association suggest increasing potassium to 4.7 grams per

day, up from the current government recommendation of 3.5 grams of potassium per day.

In a blood pressure study, researchers recruited 20 pairs of identical twins, 40 people in all, who each had blood pressure elevated slightly above the upper normal limit of 120/80 mm Hg. Twins from each pair took a



different treatment, either 500 mg or 1,000 mg of olive leaf extract per day, or counseling on a healthy lifestyle with no treatment. After eight weeks, those who had taken the 1,000 mg dose of olive leaf extract had an average 8 percent decrease in systolic blood pressure, meaning the amount of pressure in the arteries when the heart is pumping blood, and a 5 percent decrease in diastolic pressure—when the heart relaxes—compared to the start of the study. Those in the 500 mg olive leaf extract group had about a 4 percent decrease in systolic and diastolic blood pressure, and twins who got lifestyle counseling alone saw no significant difference.

REFERENCE: JOURNAL OF CLINICAL HYPERTENSION; 2008, VOL. 10, SUPPLEMENT 7, 3-11

Improving Diabetic Health and Managing Blood Sugar

In diabetics, nutrients lowered risk for heart disease and extended life after a heart attack, and vitamin K increased insulin sensitivity in men, in three new studies.

In a diabetes study, doctors explained that type 2 diabetics have a higher risk for heart and blood vessel disease because of chemical changes that can clog and stiffen blood vessels, and thought that the antioxidant vitamin E may reduce or prevent these effects. About 40 men and women with type 2 diabetes and no other disease or diabetic complications, took 500 IU of vitamin E per day. After 10 weeks, levels of three blood-clotting molecules that had been abnormally high at the start of the study had decreased by an average of 21 percent, and a chemical that relaxes the muscles around blood vessels—boosting blood flow and lowering the risk of clotting—had increased by 50 percent. Scientists followed up for another 10 weeks while participants stopped taking vitamin E and found that one

of the blood-clotting molecules had returned to the same unhealthy level as before taking vitamin E. Researchers concluded that vitamin E may be a “new tool” for protecting against blood vessel damage in type 2 diabetes.

In a vitamin C and E study, researchers noted that diabetics who have a heart attack produce abnormally high levels of unstable oxygen molecules that damage cells, and theorized that the antioxidant vitamins C and E could help diabetics live longer after a heart attack. Doctors gave 122 diabetics who had just had a heart attack 1,000 mg of vitamin C intravenously over 12 hours, followed by 400 mg of vitamin C plus 200 mg of vitamin E orally three times per day, or a placebo. After 30 days, diabetics who had taken vitamins C and E were 68 percent less likely to have died

than those who did not take vitamins C and E.

Better blood sugar

In an insulin study, researchers thought that vitamin K would increase insulin sensitivity in older adults who were not diabetic. Doctors followed 355 non-diabetic men and women, aged 60 to 80, who were taking 500 mcg of vitamin K (phylloquinone) per day as part of a study on bone loss. After 36 months, men who had taken vitamin K had significantly better insulin sensitivity than men who had taken a placebo. There was no effect for women. Insulin helps the body convert blood sugar (glucose) into energy. In diabetes, the body mishandles insulin, leading to chronically high blood sugar levels.

REFERENCE: CARDIOLOGY; 2009, VOL. 112, No. 3, 219-23

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Calcium a Key to Healthy Weight

Researchers in Sao Paulo, Brazil, analyzed the diets and lifestyles of about 1,500 men and women, aged 20 to 59, to determine if calcium affects weight. Nearly 30 percent of participants were overweight, and another 13 percent were obese. For the overall group, the average amount of calcium in the diet was about 450 mg per day. Those who consumed the least calcium, less than 265 mg per day, were 24 percent more likely to be overweight compared to those who consumed the most calcium, about 600 mg per day. Study authors believe that calcium may bind to fatty acids in the intestine, and keep these fats from absorbing into the bloodstream, helping maintain healthy weight. The doctors noted that those who consumed higher levels of calcium tended to be non-smoking women with normal weight who were physically active and who had

higher levels of education compared to those who consumed less calcium.

REFERENCE: NUTRITION; 2008, ELECTRONIC PRE-PUBLICATION



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