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Thornton Natural Healthcare's Better Health News

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Special Interest Articles:

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AND HEART ATTACK
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- OBESITY AND BOWEL
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- DYSMENORRHEA AND
ESSENTIAL FATTY
ACIDS

Pregnancy, Allergies & Omega-3 Fatty Acids

There may be a connection between taking fish oil during pregnancy and the incidence of allergies. Research appearing in the *British Medical Journal* (2012 Jan 30; 344; e184; Epublished ahead of print) looked at prenatal care for the mothers of 706 infants at high hereditary risk of developing allergies. In the randomized, placebo-controlled study, mothers were either given a

placebo or 900 mg of omega-3 fatty acids per day from the 21st week of gestation until birth. There was an overall reduced prevalence of egg sensitivity and atopic eczema in the group receiving the fish oil. There was a slight decrease in immunoglobulin E associated allergic disease (13% in the control group, compared to 9% in the group receiving the omega 3 oil).

Inhalers and Death in Asthma

An article appearing in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* (July 15, 1997 vol. 127 no. 2 142-147) cites research done at Cornell and Stanford Universities concluding that asthma inhalers that contain the drugs salmeterol or formoterol may be responsible for four out of five asthma-related deaths in the United States. The research was a review of 19 clinical trials that involved 33,826 patients. The meta-analysis concluded that patients using the inhalers were 3.5 time more likely to die and 2.5 times more likely to be hospitalized than those using a placebo.

The inhalers, while relieving asthma symptoms, also manage to increase overall inflammation and sensitivity in the airways. Death from asthma is rare, about 5,000 per year. But these inhalers do increase the chance of death. Even though they offer temporary relief, they do tend to make the overall condition worse.

Asthma is a disease that involves inflammation and airway constriction. There are natural, risk-free approaches to health care that address these issues.

Diet and Asthma

Eating processed foods, pizza, and refined foods can increase the frequency and severity of asthma attacks.

A number of studies show that diet can improve asthma symptoms. Research appearing in the journal, *Thorax* (2006; 61(12): 1048-53) looked at the diets of 598 Dutch children between the ages of 8 and 13. It found that a diet high in fish and whole grains reduced the risk of asthma. Antioxidants in the diet seem to be especially beneficial in reducing asthma symptoms. A study appearing in the journal, *Thorax* (2006; 61(5): 388-93) looked at diet and asthma symptoms in 515 adults with asthma and 515 matched controls without the disease. It found that low intake of fruit, vitamin C and manganese increased the risk for

asthma symptoms. Also, low levels of vitamin C in the serum was also associated with asthma.

Just as a good diet can reduce asthma symptoms, a poor diet can make them worse. Research appearing in the *European Respiratory Journal* (2009; 33:33-41) looked at the diets of 54,672 French women. Researchers found an increased risk of asthma attack associated with the "Western diet". Eating processed foods, pizza, and refined foods can increase the frequency and severity of asthma attacks.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids and Heart Attacks

A study that appeared in the *European Heart Journal* (Epublised ahead of print Feb. 1, 2012) looked at 3,740 patients using cholesterol-lowering medication (statin) and at 413 patients who did not take statin drugs. The subjects of the study were randomly chosen to receive either 400 mg/day of EPA plus DHA from fish oil, 2 grams of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a combination of the three fatty acids, or a placebo. During the course of the study, 13% of the statin users and 15% of the non-statin users experienced a major cardiovascular event. Among the non-statin users, 18% of those taking a placebo had a

major cardiovascular event, compared to 9% of those who were taking the fish oil. There was no difference between the number of cardiovascular events in the placebo group and the fish oil group for subjects who were taking statin medication. The authors concluded "This study suggests that statin treatment modifies the effects of omega-3 fatty acids on the incidence of major cardiovascular events." Another thing worth noting is that the percentage of people having major cardiovascular events was lower for patients taking fish oil than it was for patients taking statins.

Dysmenorrhea

A number of studies have shown natural therapies to be effective for women suffering with dysmenorrhea. Research appearing in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* (February 2009, 15(2): 129-132) compared the effect of ginger, mefenamic acid and ibuprofen on the pain of dysmenorrhea. The subjects of the study were 150 students over the age of 18 suffering from primary dysmenorrhea. They were divided into three groups and given 250 mg of ginger rhizome powder, 250 mg of mefenamic acid or 400 mg of ibuprofen. They took the dosage four times each day for three days; beginning with the start of their menstrual period. Dysmenorrhea symptoms decreased in all groups, and there was no difference in the amount of relief experienced by the women taking the herb or the women taking drugs. Ginger was as effective as the drug therapies, and was free of side-effects.

Other research, appearing in the *Western Journal of Surgical Gynecology* (1954;62:610-611) demonstrated the value of a combination of niacin, rutin and vitamin C for alleviating dysmenorrhea symptoms. Eighty women between the ages of 15 and 44 took 100 mg. of niacin two time each day, increasing the frequency of the dosage to every two or three hours when symptoms were present. About 90% of the subjects experienced relief from this treatment. A combination of 60 mg of rutin and 300 mg of vitamin C

seemed to potentiate the treatment. The women experienced relief for several months after the treatment was discontinued.

Magnesium has also been shown to be useful. In the journal *Zentralbl Gynakol* (1989;111:755-760). In a double-blind study, over 80% of subjects receiving magnesium for six months experienced a reduction in symptoms. The group receiving the magnesium also had a reduction in prostaglandin F2a (which inhibits progesterone production and may be implicated in dysmenorrhea).

In a study appearing in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research* (April 1996;103:227-231), either thiamin or placebo was given to 556 girls between the ages of 12 and 21, all of whom suffered from dysmenorrhea. The subjects receiving 100 mg/day of thiamin over a 90 day period had very good results. Most (95%) were either completely cured or most of their pain was completely relieved. Other studies have shown the value of spinal manipulation and dietary changes. As anyone who works in natural health care knows, dysmenorrhea is one symptom that responds very well to natural health care.

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Asthma

Asthma is one disease where the patient can benefit from both traditional medical care and from natural health care. There are about 300 million people suffering from asthma worldwide, with asthma causing 250,000 deaths in 2007 (according to WHO). While medical intervention can save an asthmatic's life, nutrition and natural health care can improve the day to day management of the disease. Research has shown that diet can affect the severity of asthma and that certain nutrients may be of value. This is especially important considering that inhaler overuse can increase the chance of dying from an asthma attack. An article appearing in *Family Practice News* (April 15, 1993;46) stated that deaths from asthma could be cut by 50% if physicians monitored beta agonist inhaler overuse by patients. An inhaler should last one month. Other medications can contribute to asthma attacks. An article in the *Annals of Allergy* (June 1992;68:453-462) stated that drugs may be responsible for as many as 10% of asthma attacks. NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) may be responsible for 2/3 of these drug-induced attacks. Other drugs, like muscle relaxants, beta-blockers, or antibiotics can trigger asthma attacks as well.

Magnesium is nature's muscle relaxer and can help to open airways. A randomized, placebo-controlled study appearing in the *Journal of Asthma* (2010; 47(1): 83-92) looked at 55 subjects between the ages of 21 and 55, with mild to moderate asthma. They

were randomly divided into two groups and given either a placebo or 340 mg of magnesium per day over a 6 1/2 month period. The severity of the subjects' asthma was evaluated using pulmonary function testing, methacoline challenge testing and subjective questionnaires about the severity of asthma and the quality of life. The researchers found that the subjects who received the magnesium were much more resistant to the methacoline challenge and also had great improvements on their pulmonary function tests. The magnesium group scored higher on the quality of life questionnaires as well.

There are many studies that show the benefit of antioxidants for reducing the frequency and severity of asthma attacks. A meta-analysis appearing in the journal *Thorax* (2009; 64(7): 610-9) found that a high intake of vitamins A and C was associated with a reduced risk for asthma. A previous article appearing in *Clinical and Experimental Allergy* (2000;30:615-627) also stated that antioxidants can play an important role in keeping asthma under control. It specifically mentions beta carotene and vitamin C as playing a role in aiding to keep airways open. Research appearing in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (1991;325(8):586- 587) found higher levels of free radicals in patients with asthma when compared to normal controls.

Cranberry Juice and Urinary Tract Infections

In a double-blind, placebo-controlled study, appearing in *Clinical Infectious Diseases* (2012 Feb; 54(3): 340-6), 263 children who had been treated for urinary tract infections were given either cranberry juice or a placebo daily for a period of six months. Only 16% of children in the cranberry juice group contacted at least one urinary tract infection, compared to 22% in the placebo group. The total number of

recurrences of urinary tract infections was 47 in the placebo group compared to 27 in the cranberry group. Overall, the cranberry juice group took fewer antibiotics. These results suggest that cranberry juice can reduce the recurrence of urinary tract infections in children, just as it has been demonstrated to do so in adult women.

Overall, the cranberry juice group took fewer antibiotics.

Obesity and Bowel Bacteria

The intestine is a kind of ecosystem. There are between four and seven pounds of bacteria in the large intestine. The number of bacterial cells outnumber all the cells in your body (the bacteria cells are much smaller than human cells). Bacteria perform necessary functions, like suppressing pathogens, detoxifying harmful chemicals, and producing vitamins. In natural health care there has been a concept called “dysbiosis”. Dysbiosis refers to a situation where the wrong kinds of microorganisms thrive in the intestine. The wrong microorganisms produce toxins, can irritate the lining of the intestine, and suppress the beneficial bacteria. Many people who deal in natural health see dysbiosis as a possible cause for many health problems. While this concept of dysbiosis has been controversial, research is beginning to support it.

Research published in the December, 2006 issue of the journal *Nature*, indicates that the type of bacteria found in the intestine may be related to whether a person is overweight or not. This was observed in both humans and mice. Obese humans and mice had a higher percentage

of a family of bacteria called Firmicutes and less of a type of bacteria called Bacteroidetes. The researchers were unclear whether the obesity is caused by the presence of the bacteria, or if the bacteria are present because of the obesity.

In order to find out if the presence of the bacteria caused obesity, the researchers transplanted Firmicutes into the intestines of lean mice. When the bacteria were transplanted, the mice actually began to take in more calories from the food they ate. The same amount of food actually provided more calories for the mice with the Firmicutes bacteria in the intestine than for those without the Firmicutes bacteria.

In people, dieting affected the makeup of the bowel bacteria. Bacteroidetes made up about three percent of the gut bacteria in the participants of the study who were obese. But after dieting and losing weight, the subjects had much higher levels of Bacteroidetes—close to 15%.

Dysmenorrhea and Omega-3 Fatty Acids

A wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings, and learn how by his own thought to derive benefit from his illnesses.—

Hippocrates

Dysmenorrhea is severe pain associated with the menstrual cycle. Dysmenorrhea is considered to be primary when there is no other pathology affecting the reproductive system. It is considered secondary if it is due to pathology, like endometriosis. The pain in primary dysmenorrhea is believed to be caused by the uterus contracting and from lack of oxygen in the area. Pain is usually perceived as cramps, but may be a dull, constant ache. Symptoms usually begin shortly before or during menses (bleeding). Additional symptoms may include nausea, diarrhea, frequent urination, depression or mood swings, or breast tenderness. There are some natural approaches that are helpful to women who suffer from PMS or dysmenorrhea. A double-blind, crossover study that appeared in the *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*

(Epublished ahead of print, Jan 17, 2012), looked at 95 female subjects between the ages of 18 and 22, all with primary dysmenorrhea. They were divided into two groups. One group was given an omega-3 fatty acid supplement for three months, and after a washout period, was given a placebo for another three months. The second group was given the placebo for the first three months and the omega-3 supplement for the second three months. The women were allowed to take 400 mg of ibuprofen for relief of severe menstrual pain. Women taking omega-3 fatty acids required less ibuprofen than those who were taking the placebo, demonstrating its benefit for pain associated with dysmenorrhea. Be careful buying fish oil. Pollution is a huge problem and there may be dioxin or mercury in fish oil. Your natural health care practitioner is a good resource for helping you to find reputable companies.

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