

DC On Line

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Cherries for Pain

Research from the American Chemical Society¹ suggests that tart cherries may offer natural pain relief. About 20 cherries a day, say researchers from Michigan State University, will relieve inflammation and pain in arthritis and gout patients. Anthocyanins are thought responsible for the effect. Fresh, tart cherries seem to contain a particularly effective variety of anthocyanins, which are also known to exhibit antioxidant activity. In this work, researchers found that the effectiveness was equal to or greater than many common nonsteroidal pain and anti-inflammatory drugs.

1. *Journal of Natural Products*, January 29, 1999.

Fiber and Colon Cancer Revisited

A recently concluded 16-year study of colorectal cancers contradicts previously accepted research that suggested protection was offered by diets high in fiber. This study of more than 88,000 nurses found no benefit (regarding cancer and adenoma development in the colon) of dietary fiber. In fact, the statistics indicated a 34 percent increase in those patients who consumed a lot of vegetable fiber -- a result that even the research team doesn't quite accept.² This study differs from earlier research in that subjects were asked about their diets before any cancer was apparent; in most of the earlier works, the diet was considered retrospectively.³

2. United Press, January 20, 1999.

3. *NEJM*, January 21, 1999, Charles Fuchs et al.

Low-Protein Diet before Dialysis

A study published in the *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology*⁴ concludes that kidney dialysis can be delayed with perhaps even a better outcome for the patient if a low-protein diet is tried first. Researchers from Johns Hopkins University placed 76 patients (who had reached or passed the point of end-stage kidney disease where doctors normally begin dialysis) on a vegetable and fruit diet with amino acid supplementation. Mortality in the group was 2.5 percent annually, comparing favorably to the nationwide average of 24 percent for patients on dialysis. The researchers were surprised at how well these patients maintained their blood chemistry and nutrition levels.

4. *JASN*, February 1999.

Lack of Tryptophan Implicated in Eating Disorders

A report in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*⁵ suggests that tryptophan is important in the prevention of eating disorders such as bulimia. Females who had previously recovered from bulimia reported a significant increase in depressive mood swings, loss of ability to control eating, and accentuated concerns about their body image while consuming a diet deficient in tryptophan. This effect was noted in as little as 17 hours.

The mechanism is thought to be that eating sugar and starchy foods stimulates the production of insulin, which seems to make more tryptophan available to the brain. Tryptophan is then converted to serotonin, increasing a person's sense of well-being. A person lacking tryptophan would therefore tend to suddenly crave food when their blood sugar levels dip slightly, in a desire to restore a minimal sense of well-being. Then when their chemistry becomes balanced after a binge, they hate themselves for losing control.

5. *AGP*, February, 1999.

On-Again, Off-Again HIV Treatments

A lot of research has been stimulated by a German man (known as the "Berlin patient") who, after becoming infected with the HIV virus, started and stopped treatment a number of times and then discovered the infection had disappeared. He has remained free of HIV for two years now.

One researcher at Georgetown University in Washington⁶ reports preliminary favorable results with the following technique: therapy is given until the virus disappears from the blood, then re-instituted as soon as it returns. The idea is to give the body a better opportunity to mount a defense of its own without being overwhelmed. He reports that in the patients he is working with, the interval before the virus returns appears to be lengthening -- from 1 week to 2 weeks to 6 weeks.⁷ More aggressive experiments on monkeys appear to have produced permanent results.

6. Dr. Franco Lori, head of the Research Institute for Genetic and Human Therapy.

7. Reported at the 6th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections, February 4, 1999.

Prostate Stress

New research at North Carolina State University (on rats) suggests that stress may be a major contributing factor to prostate inflammation. Rats suffering from researcher-induced prostatitis were subjected to the stress of confinement to a small space for 15 minutes, twice a day for four weeks. Rats hate being trapped in small spaces. Inflammation increased in those rats, while those not so confined healed.

Prostate inflammation is thought to be stimulated in part by prolactin. Prolactin is produced in the

stress response of both rats and humans. A human study is now being designed at the National Institutes of Health to further examine this link.⁸

8. Associated Press, April 23, 1999, reporting on the work of Dr. C. Lee Robinette.

Another Link between Obesity and Heart Disease

A Dutch researcher's work suggests that in addition to being a physical strain on the heart, obesity contributes to arterial inflammation. She contends that a long-term, low-grade inflammation exists inside the arteries of obese women six times as frequently compared to those of normal weight. C-reactive protein was used to measure the inflammation, statistically correcting for other conditions that raise those levels; other studies will likely be required to validate her conclusions. It is hypothesized that the inflammation is caused by a high concentration of a chemical produced by the fat cells (interleukin-6) entering the blood stream.⁹

9. Associated Press, reporting on work by Marjolein Visser, a weight specialist at Amsterdam's Vrije University, April 21, 1999.

Ten Deaths in Drug's First Three Months

The popular "super aspirin" Celebrex, during its first three months on the market, was linked to 10 deaths and a number of lesser reactions.¹⁰ Half of the deaths were due to gastrointestinal bleeding and ulcers, according to "adverse incident" reports filed with the FDA. In its first 13 weeks on the market, 2.5 million prescriptions were filled. The drug is used to treat arthritis. When asked about these incidents by the *Wall Street Journal*, the FDA said more research would have to be done before any conclusions were drawn about the drug's safety. The FDA has received 53 reports of doctors and pharmacists being confused about the drug's name. Doctors have mistakenly prescribed Celexa and Cerebyx for Celebrex.

10. Associated Press, April 20, 1999.

Cold Sores a Good Sign?

An epidemiology researcher from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle says that oral cancer is more prevalent in people who don't get cold sores. Upon interviewing 260 patients, she found that those who harbored the herpes simplex 1 virus but didn't get cold sores were twice as likely to contract oral cancers. She concludes that a cold sore may be a sign of a healthy immune system.¹¹ (I might agree that it is a sign of at least some immune system activity, though the word "healthy" may be a bit strong.)

11. United Press, April 15, 1999, reporting on research presented by Jacqueline Starr at the annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research in Philadelphia.

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