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Circulation & Heart

Nutrients improve circulatory and heart health

Cocoa flavanols

Earlier trials found a link between cocoa flavanols and better circulation. In this study, 45 healthy men, aged 18 to 35, took a placebo, or about 550 mg of procyanidins, plus either 20 mg or 130 mg of epicatechins, with breakfast for one month. Both flavanols were from cocoa extract.

Doctors excluded men who had taken antibiotics or vitamins within the last 90 days, those on a vegan, vegetarian, or other extreme diet, and those who consumed more than two alcoholic drinks per day. Twenty-four hours before beginning the 30-day trial, doctors asked the men to not eat flavanol-rich foods including fruits, vegetables, cocoa, chocolate, tea, coffee, or alcohol.

After one month, men in the high-dose epicatechins group saw significant increases in the ability of blood vessels and arteries to relax and dilate, and improvements in their flexibility, both of which are keys to circulatory and heart health. Both cocoa flavanol groups also saw lower total cholesterol levels compared to placebo, which doctors believe is due to the action of the procyanidins.

Polyphenols

Earlier studies suggest polyphenols may help prevent chronic diseases, but there are few trials that measure



the health effects of polyphenols in populations over time. In this study, doctors measured total and individual polyphenols in the diets of 84,158 French adults and followed up over a nine-year study period, ending in 2017.

Overall, those with higher levels of polyphenols in the diet, especially anthocyanins, catechins, and flavonols, were significantly less likely to develop heart and circulatory disease compared to those who consumed fewer polyphenols.

Discussing the findings, doctors said, “In this large prospective study, three categories of polyphenols showed strong linear associations with a decreased risk of cardiovascular diseases: anthocyanins, catechins, and flavonols.”

REFERENCE: AMERICAN JOURNAL OF CLINICAL NUTRITION; OCTOBER, 2018, PUBLISHED ONLINE

MARCH'S

Healthy Insight Carotenoids Reduce Metabolic Syndrome

Doctors reviewed 11 metabolic syndrome studies between 1997 and 2017 covering 29,673 participants including adults and adolescents. Overall, as levels of mixed carotenoids increased, chances for metabolic syndrome decreased. The individual carotenoids beta-carotene, alpha-carotene, and beta-cryptoxanthin were most beneficial. According to the doctors, carotenoids may play a role in regulating and distributing fat—adipose—tissue, possibly reducing or preventing its accumulation around the abdomen, or waist, a key factor in metabolic syndrome. Carotenoids may also help reduce inflammatory factors and insulin resistance.

REFERENCE: NUTRITION REVIEWS; JANUARY, 2019, VOL. 77, NO. 1

This Issue

| | |
|---|---|
| NUTRIENTS IMPROVED MOOD, REDUCED HOSPITAL STAYS | 2 |
| OMEGA-3S, PRE- & PROBIOTICS HELP NON-ALCOHOLIC FATTY LIVER DISEASE | 2 |
| VITAMIN D IMPROVES PREGNANCY, BIRTH, AND CHILD HEALTH | 3 |
| BETA-GLUCAN AND VITAMIN D REDUCE INFECTION IN ATHLETES | 3 |
| DHEA IMPROVED SEXUAL HEALTH IN PREMENOPAUSAL WOMEN | 4 |

Mental Health

Nutrients improve mood, reduce hospital stays

Longjack, multivitamins reduce stress

Because pharmaceutical mood drugs have harsh side effects, doctors want to identify complementary and alternative medicines that are effective, but safer. In this study, 93 moderately stressed healthy participants, aged 25 to 65, from underweight to obese, took a placebo or 100 mg of the adaptogen longjack (*eurycoma longifolia*) plus a standard multivitamin-mineral per day.

While there were no changes for placebo, those in the longjack/multivitamin group reported fewer limitations due to emotional health after six weeks, and after 12 weeks, more energy and less fatigue.

For mental health, at week 12, the longjack group reported twice the improvement compared to placebo, and for emotional well-being, nearly three

times the improvement. The ability to function socially continued to improve through week 12 for the longjack group, but improvements were lower, and had ceased improving by week six for placebo.

Probiotics reduce hospital stays

This is the first known study of probiotics in bipolar disorder; the alternating periods of depression and elevated, or manic, mood. In this study, 66 participants with bipolar disorder began taking a daily placebo or the probiotics *bifidobacterium lactis* and *lactobacillus rhamnosus*, along with standard bipolar medication, after being admitted to the hospital for a manic episode.

Over the 24-week observation

period, 24 of the 33 taking the placebo had to be readmitted to the hospital compared to 8 of the 33 taking probiotics. Hospital stays were also shorter for probiotics, lasting 2.8 days on average, compared to 8.3 days for placebo. Doctors said the results add to evidence of the mind-gut connection.

REFERENCE: FOOD AND NUTRITION RESEARCH; 2018, VOL. 62, PUBLISHED ONLINE



Healthy Liver

Omega-3s, pre- and probiotics help treat non-alcoholic fatty liver disease

What is non-alcoholic fatty liver disease?

NAFLD occurs when excess fat builds up in the liver due to causes other than alcohol. Chances increase with diabetes, obesity, and age, and there is currently no approved drug treatment.

The liver produces most of the proteins the body needs, turns nutrients from food into energy, helps digest fats, and removes bacteria and other toxins



from the blood. The liver also prevents nutrient shortages by storing vitamins, minerals, and sugars.

Omega-3s

Earlier studies found those with NAFLD had lower levels of omega-3s in the liver. Doctors in this review analyzed 17 NAFLD studies that supplemented EPA and DHA in doses ranging from 1,000 mg to more than 3,000 mg per day.

Overall, omega-3 supplements reduced two of the three main liver enzymes that signal liver-cell damage and inflammation, and fat levels and fat retained in the liver were both significantly reduced. Body mass index scores improved, and triglycerides, and total and LDL cholesterol levels

declined, while levels of HDL, the “good” cholesterol, increased.

Pre- and probiotics

Doctors in this review analyzed 25 prebiotic, probiotic, and synbiotic—combining pre- and probiotics—studies covering 1,309 participants.

Overall, the three micro-biotic treatments reduced body mass index scores on average by 0.37. The normal-weight BMI range is 18.5 to 24.9. The micro-biotics also returned to normal levels the three main liver enzymes that indicate liver damage. Those taking micro-biotics also saw reduced triglycerides and lower total and LDL cholesterol levels.

REFERENCE: NUTRITION REVIEWS; 2018, VOL. 76, NO. 8, 581-602

Women & Babies

Vitamin D improves pregnancy, birth, child health

Better chances for pregnancy, live births

Women who have had one miscarriage are more likely to have another. In this study, doctors measured



vitamin D levels in 1,191 women with a previous miscarriage, aged 18 to 40, before pregnancy and again at the eighth week of pregnancy. The women were participating in the Effects of Aspirin in Gestation and Reproduction trial, and taking a low dose (81 mg) of aspirin daily to try to prevent a second miscarriage.

During a follow-up period of up to six menstrual cycles, women whose vitamin D levels were sufficient—at or above 30 nanograms per milliliter of blood—were 10 percent more likely to become pregnant and 15 percent more likely to have a live birth compared to women with insufficient levels of vitamin D. Among women who became pregnant, each vitamin D increase of 10 nanograms per milliliter of blood before conceiving lowered chances of miscarriage by 12 percent.

Reduced wheezing in preterm infants

Babies born prematurely are more likely to have immature lungs and airways, increasing chances for wheezing, and premature black infants in particular have high rates.

In this study, 300 premature black infants received oral vitamin D supplements in formula or human milk until reaching 200 IU per day, then took 400 IU of vitamin D per day, or got vitamin D from diet alone.

After 12 months, children taking vitamin D supplements were 34 percent less likely to develop wheezing, and were also 2.8 percent less likely to develop upper respiratory tract infection, and 14.2 percent less likely to develop lower respiratory tract infection.

REFERENCE: DIABETES & ENDOCRINOLOGY; 2018, VOL. 6, No. 9, 725-32

Athletic Performance

Beta-glucan and vitamin D reduce infection in athletes

Yeast beta-glucan

This is the first known controlled trial of yeast beta-glucan in upper respiratory tract infection (URTI) in marathon runners. In this study, 357 participants in the 2017 Austin Marathon took 250 mg of yeast beta-glucan per day or a dairy beverage placebo containing the same amount of calories, beginning 45 days before, and continuing the day of through 45 days after the race.

Overall, those with a URTI in the yeast beta-glucan group had symptoms for an average of 27 days compared to those infected in the placebo group, who reported symptoms for 49 days. Total severity of URTI symptoms, including nasal discharge and sore throat, were 19.2 percent lower in the yeast beta-

glucan group.

After the marathon, runners with URTI who had taken yeast beta-glucan missed no more than two workout days, compared to 10 missed days for those infected in the placebo group.

Vitamin D

Intense physical training in winter increases chances for URTI. In this study, doctors gave 25 male taekwondo athletes a placebo or 5,000 IU of vitamin D per day during the four-week winter training session.

Vitamin D levels rose 255 percent in the vitamin D group and remained unchanged for placebo. Also compared to placebo, among those who came down with URTI, the vitamin D group reported 40 percent less severe

symptoms including sneezing, runny nose, and coughing. Athletes also answered questionnaires about quality of life, which scored 27.8 percent higher for the vitamin D group compared to placebo.

REFERENCE: JOURNAL OF DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS; OCTOBER, 2018, PUBLISHED ONLINE



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Healthy Women

DHEA improved sexual function in premenopause

Physical and emotional

The adrenal gland in men and women produces the hormone DHEA, or dehydroepiandrosterone, which helps create other hormones including testosterone and estrogen. But naturally produced DHEA levels peak in early adulthood and slowly decline with age.

In this study, 50 infertile premenopausal women, average age 41, took 25 mg of DHEA three times per day for a minimum of six weeks before starting any other infertility treatment. At the start of the study, and four to eight weeks later, the women completed a standard female sexual function index (FSFI) questionnaire.

Overall, androgen hormone levels including DHEA and testosterone

increased, and FSFI scores improved 7 percent. Individual attributes including desire, arousal, and lubrication increased 17, 12 and 8 percent, respectively.

Among women who began the study with the lowest FSFI scores, overall improvement was 34 percent, with larger improvements in desire, arousal and lubrication, a 54 percent increase in orgasm, and less pain compared to pretreatment.

REFERENCE: FERTILITY AND STERILITY; SEPTEMBER, 2018, VOL. 110, No. 4, PUBLISHED ONLINE



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