

HOTSHEET

HotSheet is a gathering of the hottest news in the alternative health industry.

Use of plastics for food questioned

Plastics are versatile, lightweight, and often reusable. In the kitchen alone, plastics have revolutionized how we eat and drink, as plastic containers have made food storage more convenient and allowed food to stay fresh longer. **Now, questions are being raised about whether chemicals in some of these products may pose health risks.**

Of new concern to some scientists in the United States are the small amounts of chemicals found in some of these plastics that seep out of the products over time. They question whether some chemicals have the potential to damage the reproductive system and increase the risk of birth defects, breast cancer, prostate cancer and infertility in humans.

Dr. Frederick Vom Saal, a professor at the University of Missouri, says his study of low doses of one such chemical in laboratory mice showed damage to offspring and found **"the entire reproductive system of the male altered."** His concern is that similar effects might be found in products containing these chemicals.

The Food and Drug Administration and the plastics industry say these chemicals are safe and pose no threat to human health.

In addition, the industry questions Vom Saal's findings, noting that subsequent studies of low doses of that chemical have shown different results.

Dr. Jim Lamb, a toxicologist representing the industry, says: "We've got data to show it's safe. And the exposures are low and we shouldn't be knocking out safe products."



Yoga, meditation relieve chronic pain.

To help people with chronic pain (pain which lasts 6 months or longer), a psychologist at Texas Tech Health Sciences Center has announced that he

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EXPERTADVICE



LOUISE TENNEY, M.H.

Louise Tenney, M.H., has written numerous titles dealing with the natural health and nutrition world. Some of her most popular works include Today's Herbal Health and Today's Herbal Health for Women.

Back pain treatable with natural agents

Q: About two years ago, I suddenly developed a chronic case of lower back pain. To put it bluntly, I am not comfortable with ibuprofen or other synthetic painkillers. Are there any herbal remedies that can ease my pain? – *Jerry in Houston, Texas.*

A: First, you should rule out any physical causes for your back pain (bad mattress, back spasms, etc.) If it still persists, there are a whole host of herbal remedies that can help. You'll certainly want to make sure you take some-

thing to reduce the inflammation and swelling that is usually the result of back strain. Glucosamine sulfate and chondroitin sulfate are both ideal. You will also want to try an herbal combination of white willow, blue vervain, rosemary leaves, skullcap, kelp and boswellia. Each of these herbs are natural aspirins or anti-inflammatory in nature. **TH**

Q: My husband has really bad breath. Nothing seems to work—chewing gum, mints, mouthwash, high-potency anti-bacteria toothpaste—it all does little to help. What natural remedies exist for such an ailment? – *Anonymous in Philadelphia.*

A: Bad breath is one of life's maladies that occasionally strikes each of us. But for some, it is a recurring nightmare that shatters self-confidence. First, check for gum disease or tooth decay, which are the major culprits of bad breath. Next, try supplementing your husband's diet with acidophilus, which will help keep the bowels clean (the bowels, interestingly enough, are a major cause of nasty breath). Liquid

chlorophyll is an excellent mouth freshener and absorbs foul odors in the mouth and throat. Other herbs that help the problem are the old standbys like peppermint leaves, parsley, cloves and fennel. Chewing on the leaves of these plants after a meal can do wonders to eliminate bad breath. **TH**

Q: My daughter has picked up a pretty persistent case of mononucleosis. Are there any natural treatments that might help her? – *Sophie in Vancouver, Washington.*

A: Mononucleosis is an acute viral disease that usually lasts anywhere between one to four weeks. Symptoms can include a flu-like sore throat, vomiting, muscle aches, loss of appetite, etc. The disease is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus, which also factors in the onset of chronic fatigue syndrome. Some good natural treatments include germanium, which has shown significant efficacy in those afflicted with the Epstein-Barr virus. In one study, 20 to 30 percent of those with mononucleosis showed dramatic improvement after taking germanium. Another treatment which may be successful is using mood-altering herbs like St. John's wort or kava. Some physicians have gone so far as to state that getting over a disease like mononucleosis is simply mind over matter—in other words, if you have feelings of contentment and relaxation (which St. John's wort and kava both cause), you will begin to feel better. Along those same lines, many believe that ailments like mononucleosis are exacerbated by stress. Good antistress herbs, like Siberian ginseng, kava, or St. John's wort, are effective in relieving stress and helping the body focus its energy on extinguishing mononucleosis. Finally, kelp helps the thyroid (which is affected by mononucleosis) regain its proper state in order to fight off the Epstein-Barr virus. **TH**

LEGALINFO

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YourHealth

Protecting the Health of Your Family

SLEEPTOFF

Sleep apnea, obesity, diabetes link discovered

Adults who suffer from obstructive sleep apnea are three times more likely to also have diabetes and more likely to suffer a stroke in the future, according to a new UCLA School of Dentistry/Department of Veterans Affairs study published recently.

Sleep apnea, a serious condition marked by loud snoring, irregular breathing and interrupted oxygen intake, affects an estimated nine million Americans. The culprit? Carrying extra pounds.

Dr. Arthur H. Friedlander, associate professor of oral and maxillofacial surgery at the UCLA School of Dentistry, says that the blame rests solely on being overweight.

Surplus weight interferes with insulin's ability to propel sugars from digested food across the cell membrane, robbing the cells of needed carbohydrates. Diabetes results when glucose builds up in the bloodstream and can't be utilized by the body.

Being overweight can also lead to obstructive sleep apnea, according to Friedlander.

"When people gain too much weight, fatty deposits build up along the throat and line the breathing passages," he explained. "The muscles in this region slacken during sleep, forcing the airway to narrow and often close altogether."

Reclining on one's back magnifies the situation. When an overweight person lies down, gravity shoves the fat in the neck backwards. This blocks the airway and can bring breathing to a halt.

Friedlander tested the blood sugar of 54 randomly selected male veterans whom doctors had previously diagnosed with sleep apnea. He discovered that 17 of the 54 patients, or 31 percent, unknowingly suffered from adult-onset diabetes.

Using the same sample, Friedlander also took panoramic X-rays of the men's necks and jaws. The X-rays indicated that 12 of the 54 patients, or 22 per-

cent, revealed calcified plaques in the carotid artery leading to the brain.

These plaques block blood flow, significantly increasing patients' risk for stroke. Seven of the 12, or 58 percent, were also diagnosed with diabetes.

In dramatic comparison, the 17 patients diagnosed with diabetes showed nearly twice the incidence of blockage. Seven of the 17 men, or 41 percent, had carotid plaques. Only five of the 54 patients who displayed plaques did not have also diabetes.

"This is the first time that science has uncovered a link between sleep apnea and diabetes," said Friedlander. "The data suggest that someone afflicted with both diabetes and sleep apnea is more likely to suffer a stroke in the future."

"Persons going to the doctor for a sleep-apnea exam should request that their blood be screened for diabetes, especially if they are overweight," he cautioned. **TH**

HEARTHEALTH

Isoflavones may cut menopausal heart risk

It's no secret that a woman's body goes through many and various changes during menopause. What may be a mystery is that some of these changes can affect a woman's cardiovascular health. When a woman's estrogen levels decrease during menopause, blood vessels can become less responsive to changes in blood flow. Until now, this decline in cardiovascular health was a risk women had to live with if they opted against hormone replacement therapy. However, recent research published in the March issue of *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* suggests that promensil, an isoflavone-based supplement derived from red clover, may aid women in the maintenance of blood vessel elasticity and prevent

hypertension during menopause.

Researchers in Australia tested 17 women, who first took a placebo for three weeks, then a 40 mg dose of isoflavones for five weeks, then took 80 mg of isoflavones for five weeks. Three women served as controls, receiving placebo throughout. The results were very impressive. A 20 percent improvement in elasticity was noted after the 40 mg dose compared with 24 percent after 80 mg and no change for those taking placebo. No side effects were associated with the isoflavone supplement. Say the researchers, "An important cardiovascular risk factor, artery elasticity, which diminishes with menopause, was significantly improved with red clover isoflavones." **TH**

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has developed a program combining both yoga and meditation with remarkable results. **More than 80% of the participants reported more effective stress and pain management.**

Pat Randolph, Ph.D., director of Psychology Services in the Pain Center at TTUHSC, began a pain/stress management program nearly seven years ago which uses meditation and yoga exercises in coordination with medical and psychological treatments.

Randolph followed the progress of 67 chronic pain patients who used the program in addition to medical and psychological intervention.

He found that, among patients who used meditation practices to self-regulate pain, 78% reported an improvement in subjective mood; **80% said their ability to handle stress improved**, and 86% reported higher awareness of internal thought and feeling states.

Also, 98% indicated that they had learned something of lasting value from the program.

"What we know about the definition of pain is that it is a complex interaction between sensations, thoughts, and feelings or emotions. So when we treat pain, we need to utilize both medical and psychological methods," says Randolph.

The program is based on Theravada Buddhism, an Eastern doctrine that assumes suffering and stress to be part of life, but can be relieved through awareness and letting go of expectations.

For more information, you may contact the Texas Tech Health Sciences Center at (806) 743-2143.



Vitamins may aid cancer treatment

While the role of antioxidants in preventing disease has received much attention, some researchers think the vitamins may also improve cancer treatment.

Giving cancer patients high doses of beta-carotene and vita-

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mins C and E may protect their healthy cells from the onslaught of tumor-killing treatments like chemotherapy and radiation, say Denver researchers. Further, they contend, the antioxidants may bolster the effectiveness of standard cancer therapy.

No studies on humans back up these ideas, but in animal studies and experiments on cancer cells, antioxidants have shown promise, according to a report in the current issue of the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*.

Kedar N. Prasad, lead author of the report, said more definitive data will come from a current trial of the effects of antioxidant treatment on cancer patients. Already, though, Prasad and his colleagues at the Center for Vitamins and Cancer Research at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center believe antioxidants may become an important cancer weapon.

Antioxidants have been studied as disease fighters because they prevent cell damage from oxygen molecules known as free radicals, which are produced during normal metabolism. One recent study suggested that **an antioxidant found in tomatoes might explain the link between tomato consumption and lowered risk for some cancers.**

In their experiments, Prasad and colleagues found that high doses of multiple antioxidants can not only protect normal cells during cancer treatment, but can also help fight back tumors. Together with diet and lifestyle changes, antioxidants may improve standard cancer therapy, they reported.

According to Prasad, antioxidants have garnered little enthusiasm among oncologists partly because they worry that the vitamins might actually protect cancer cells from free radicals generated during chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

"But," said Prasad, "these vitamins are very selective."

Normal cells, he explained, are programmed to pick up a maximum level of the vitamins and nothing more, which protects them from an antioxidant overdose. Cancer cells, howev-

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ResearchNews

The Big Breaks in Health Research

HIPHYPNO

Hypnotherapy can help treat ailments

Hypnosis has recently been gaining more and more attention in its use to treat medically diagnosed conditions.

Phyllis Alden, consultant psychologist in the department of clinical oncology at Derbyshire Royal Infirmary, believes hypnosis can not only help ease the anxiety of being treated for cancer, but can reduce its symptoms.

Hypnosis is now being used to treat a wide variety of conditions in the NHS, including pain relief, irritable bowel syndrome, anxiety and depression. Dentists are also using it to help patients who have a phobia for the dentist's chair.

Ms Alden, who is also honorary secretary of the British Society of Experimental and Clinical Hypnosis (BSECH) which is meeting this weekend, says hypnosis helps cancer patients in a variety of ways. According to Ms. Alden, it helps people to achieve control of their emotions and be calm and relaxed. It can also help in symptom control, for example, treating pain and nausea.

One 76-year-old man she treated became panicked at the thought of receiving radiotherapy. He had been urgently referred to her with cancer of the eyelid and risked losing his eye

without treatment. Even under hypnosis, he panicked so Ms Alden tried to find out what was causing the panic. She traced it back to when the man was 10 years old and he was held upside down by his father because he had stopped him from hitting his mother.

Apparently, this treatment by his father made him feel helpless. The radiotherapy made him feel similarly helpless. After finding the cause of his problems, he was able to have radiotherapy.

Many qualified hypnotists believe that people have a general distrust of hypnotherapy because of its use in entertainment. People feel hypnosis will make them do something stupid or something they don't want to. But that is not the way it is used clinically. Instead, the idea is to give people more control, not to take it away from them.

Like Ms. Alden, others want to see greater regulation of the profession to stop unqualified people from taking advantage of patients.

They hope that more can be done to promote the advantages of clinical hypnotherapy, for example, by training more therapists and by spreading the word among other health workers. **TH**

SupplementSpotlight

A Brief Look at a Superstar of the Supplement World

LUCKY CLOVER

Red clover offers potent cleansing capabilities

SCIENTIFIC NAMES:

Trifolium pratense

COMMON NAMES:

Red clover

COMMON USES:

detoxification agent, blood cleansing agent, infections

Clinical studies have found that red clover contains antibiotic properties against several bacteria, including those that cause tuberculosis. It has

been discovered that red clover contains molybdenum, a trace element that is now recognized as essential in clearing the body of nitrogenous waste material. many naturopathic physicians use this herb as an alterative, including it in regular cleansing and detoxification programs, such as cleanses and fasts.

Some of the more common ailments for which red clover has traditionally been used

include acne, bladder and urinary tract infections, boils, bronchitis, leukemia, liver disorders, nervous conditions, psoriasis, skin ailments, and even cancerous tumors.

As far as safety and use is concerned, red clover is considered an extremely safe and effective herbal agent. No known toxicity exists, especially when suggested dosages are followed. **TH**

FoodStuff

Eat Healthy, Live Better

EATING ESSENTIALS

Tired of hot summer days? Try these cool treats

CARIBBEAN KIWI SALAD

Per Serving

1 kiwi, peeled and quartered
2 large strawberries, hulled and quartered
1/2 of an orange, peeled, seeded and sliced

Arrange attractively on individual serving plates.

Dressing

1 ripe banana
1/4 cup unsweetened coconut milk
Juice of half a lime
2 Tb maple syrup

Blend dressing in ingredients until smooth. Chill until serving. Drizzle over fruit and pour remaining dressing in a small pitcher to pass around. Makes enough dressing for four individual servings.

RASPBERRY DREAM PIE

2 cups natural graham crackers, crushed
1/4 cup safflower oil
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1/2 cup rice syrup

1/4 cup pecans, finely chopped
4 cups fresh raspberries, sliced
1 cup lowfat, silken tofu
1 teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 350°. Combine graham crackers, pecans and oil. Mix well, and press into a glass pie pan. Bake for 10 minutes. Remove from oven, and let cool. While crust is baking, combine raspberries with lemon juice. Set aside. Combine tofu, rice syrup and vanilla, and puree until smooth. Stir in raspberries, and spoon into crust. Bake for another seven minutes, or until berries are soft and juicy. Remove from oven, and cool thoroughly in refrigerator to set. Garnish with additional berries, and serve cold. Makes about 8 servings.

SWEETSTUFF

Sweet solutions for blood sugar balance

Imagine a person eating his or her own weight in sugar. Sound unhealthy? The average American eats approximately 150 pounds of sugar every year, usually in the form of sodas, candy, desserts and other “treats.” In addition, excessive consumption of refined carbohydrates, such as pasta, white breads, etc., forces the body to deal with even more simple sugars, resulting in what some refer to as “sugar shock.”

Sugar shock comes about when we give our bodies significantly more refined carbohydrates or simple sugars than it needs. The sugars are quickly broken down and assimilated, which provides the body with an abundance of energy and often gives a feeling of a “buzz.” Eventually, however, the sugar is consumed, and the person’s blood sugar levels drop suddenly. To compensate for this “downer” feeling, the body forms the cravings for more simple sugars to quickly raise blood sugar levels. This can create a spiral or cycle effect that can do serious damage to one’s well-being.

When blood sugar is too low, the adrenal glands secrete the hormone cortisol and the pituitary glands secrete adrenocorticotropic hormone,

both of which in turn stimulate the liver to release glycogen (sugar is converted and stored as glycogen). In healthy individuals, this system works beautifully. However, when it is dysfunctional, these swings can create problems, including stress on the body, hypoglycemia, and diabetes.

As mentioned, a major problem with our modern diet is the prevalence of refined sugars and simple carbohydrates. Complex carbohydrates, however, take longer to break down, and therefore help cut down on the sugar highs and lows.

To help battle these conditions, there are natural sweetening agents that can slow down the sugar-breakdown process or that are devoid of carbohydrates and calories. **L-glutamine** is an amino acid that may prevent the development of glucose regulation problems. **Chromium picolinate** is a mineral that helps regulate blood-sugar levels, which is necessary for individuals with diabetes and hypoglycemia. Finally, **Gymnema sylvestre** is an Ayurvedic herb that commonly used by diabetics to prevent intestinal absorption of saccharide sugars. **TH**

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er, accumulate the vitamin to levels that may be high enough to stunt their growth or even kill them, according to Prasad.

Based on their experiments, as well as their observations of some cancer patients receiving antioxidants, **Prasad’s team recommends that cancer treatment include doses of vitamin C, vitamin E and beta-carotene.**

The Colorado team’s results show antioxidants may have a role beyond just the prevention of disease, Blumberg said. Clinical trials, he added, should explore the possibility.



Fruit improves heart health in teenagers

Teenage girls who ate **four servings of fruit a day** had the healthiest cardiac profiles, according to a study investigating the relation of diet and fitness to cardiovascular health.

Tom Lloyd, Ph.D., and colleagues from the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine at Hershey Medical Center in Hershey, measured cardiovascular health indicators such as blood levels of cholesterol, beta-carotene, and vitamin E in 86 teenage girls. The researchers also measured the girls’ body fat, took histories of athletic activity, tested for aerobic capacity, strength and flexibility, and analyzed three-day diet records.

The girls were arranged into five groups according to their aerobic power. Compared to girls of lowest aerobic ability, those in the highest group had **lower total cholesterol levels, lower ratios of total cholesterol to HDL (“good”) cholesterol, higher beta-carotene and vitamin E levels, significantly lower percentages of body fat, higher athletic scores for strength and flexibility, and double the fruit intake.**

High-fruit diets correlated with **increased fitness**, decreased body fat and better cholesterol profiles, demonstrating that eating well to prevent heart disease is as

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important for teenagers as it is for adults.

[American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 1998 April; 67:624-630].



Vitamin C use decreases cataracts

A study tracking the effects of long-term **vitamin C supplementation** finds that women who took the antioxidant vitamin for at least 10 years significantly **lowered their risk** of developing cataracts.

Oxidative stress, particularly ultraviolet light exposure, seems to play a central role in cataract development. Higher intakes of antioxidant vitamins C and E and carotenoids, however, can lower this common cataract risk, according to previous laboratory and population studies.

The latest effort to examine the relationship between long-term vitamin C intake and cataracts began in 1976. Paul Jacques and colleagues at the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts sampled a pool of 121,700 female nurses. The researchers purposely over-sampled women with high and low vitamin C intakes to add statistical oomph to their observations.

Researchers ranked women according to vitamin C intake based on questionnaires taken in 1980, 1984 and 1986. Women in the lowest percentile consumed less than 93 milligrams of vitamin C a day. Women in the highest percentile consumed more than 359 milligrams a day. The RDA for vitamin C is 60 mg per day.

The authors of the study concluded that **long-term vitamin C supplementation** may substantially **reduce the development** of age-related lens problems.

In the meantime, people can lower their cataract risk by wearing sunglasses outside during the day, quitting smoking and eating citrus fruits, peppers and dark green leafy veggies.

[Amer J Clin Nutr, 66: October 1997]

SAMe—wonder healing agent

alcohol, heavy metals, pesticides, solvents, etc. SAMe also participates in all kinds of biochemical reactions which sustain life.

For instance, SAMe is vital to the manufacture and maintenance of neurotransmitter compounds like serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine and phosphatidylserine. It also has the ability to help these brain chemicals bind better to their receptor sites which enhances tissue levels in the brain.

Moreover, research tells us that increased levels of SAMe can boost detoxification in the body which includes getting rid of not only poisons from our environment, but old biochemical compounds, like old neurotransmitters, made by the body itself.

The more efficiently we can sweep these from brain cells, the better new chemicals can function, helping to boost brain function and mood.

In addition, SAMe is currently generating a great deal of interest for its significant therapeutic properties. SAMe takes part in a chemical process called "methylation" which is the way that the body synthesizes the chemical components of cartilage and brain chemicals, and detoxifies potentially dangerous substances. Because of its involvement in these areas, it is now under consideration as a viable treatment compound for joint problems and depression. A number of impressive studies have been published supporting the notion that raising levels of SAMe may prove very valuable for a number of conditions.

SAMe AND DEPRESSION

The National Institute of Mental Health has estimated that over 20 million Americans may be suffering from serious depression at any given time. In addition, millions more suffer

from serious mood and anxiety disorders. We are just now beginning to realize how vulnerable brain chemistry is to even the slightest cellular disruption which inevitably impacts mood.

SAMe works to detoxify brain cells and also plays a role in how certain neurotransmitters linked to mood are made, and how they are received. Clearly, SAMe has to be the best clinically-documented, non-prescription

"The overwhelming consensus of these studies is that SAMe is at least as good as antidepressant drugs and perhaps even better."

antidepressant compound available today. SAMe may provide a viable alternative to people with depression who cannot take prescription medications or do not want to deal with their side effects.

SAMe's antidepressant effect was first cited in Italy in 1973. Since then, almost 40 clinical trials have been conducted involving hundreds of patients. The overwhelming consensus of these studies is that SAMe is at least as good for patients as antidepressant drugs and perhaps even better. While the exact mechanism involved in mood elevation is not entirely understood, it is believed that SAMe has a positive effect on the membranes of brain cells which sets into motion a series of cellular events impacting brain methyl groups and resulting in an elevated mood. Study after study confirm that SAMe is not only effective, but it comes with such few side effects that it is remarkably well tolerated, even in the elderly or in psychologically disturbed patients.

In addition, there is ample evidence that SAMe could be an effective agent for battling various types of depression, including seasonal affective disorder, post-partum depression, and related nervous system disorders.

SAMe AND RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Rheumatoid arthritis is the most severe type of the disease and is classified as an autoimmune disorder. The body's immune system acts against the joints and surrounding tissue the same way it would attack an unwanted invader. Joints in the hands, feet and arms become extremely painful, stiff and eventually deformed. This type of arthritis can affect the entire body. While no data

is available yet on the effect of SAMe in the disease process, we do know that it can help combat the depression which can accompany rheumatoid arthritis.

A double-blind study to compare the efficacy and tolerability of SAMe, with that of placebo in the treatment of depression in rheumatoid arthritic (RA) patients showed a significant improvement in the depression in RA patients, and there was a significant difference between SAMe and placebo in all variables measured. In addition, no side effects were reported using SAMe for treatment of depression.

OTHER DISORDERS AND SAMe

There are a number of other conditions that SAMe is believed to be able to treat. Among these are dementia, Parkinson's disease, fibromyalgia, osteoarthritis, joint pain, liver disease, hepatitis, Alzheimer's disease, hearing disorders, sleeping disorders, migraines and cirrhosis. **TH**

HCL. Therefore, don't take any supplements that contain HCL or promote its production.

NATURAL SUPPLEMENTS THAT PROMOTE GOOD DIGESTION

Proteolytic and Digestive Enzymes: These aid in the breakdown of protein and other substances for proper absorption. They are also important for combating excess gas and bloating.

Glucmannan: This is a colon cleanser that aids in the formation of normal bowel movements.

Acidophilus: This is a friendly bowel

bacteria that aids the body in properly breaking down and absorbing nutrients.

Aloe Vera: Is great for treating heartburn and other symptoms. Is also good for avoiding constipation.

Fennel, Catnip and Peppermint: All three of these herbs are well recognized as aiding in digestion and relieving symptoms such as heartburn.

Papaya and Pineapple: Contain papain and bromelain, enzymes known to promote good digestion.

Trace Minerals: These help relieve symptoms related directly to problems of the lower bowel.

Ginger: Helps relieve nausea and settle a sour stomach.

Anise: Can help settle a sour stomach and relieve other symptoms.

Alfalfa: Provides needed vitamin K and other trace minerals, which are all essential to optimal digestive function.

Beyond just taking supplements, one must realize that by eating a balance diet full of fresh vegetables and fruits, whole grains, fresh water, and limited in processed foods, one can well overcome many of the problems that come with digestive dysfunction. **TH**

PALMETTOPOWER

Saw palmetto outperforms synthetics in treating enlarged prostate

One of the great success stories in botanical medicine is the European use of phytomedicines in treating enlarged prostate, or benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). The condition, which affects roughly half of men over 70 years of age, reduces quality of life by causing frequent urination, nighttime awakenings, and other urinary difficulties. Standard American therapy consists primarily of treatment with synthetic prescription drugs, which can have significant side effects. In contrast, European treatment frequently substitutes the use of medicinal plants with very good clinical support and a superior safety record.

This comparative review discusses results of a number of studies investigating the effectiveness and safety of phytomedicines and synthetic drugs in the treatment of BPH., with a focus on saw palmetto (*Serena repens* Bartram, Palmaceae, formerly *Sabal serrulata*). During the course of one three year trial involving 309 men, saw palmetto was associated with a significant increase in urinary flow rate (6.1 ml per second) and a 50% decrease in residual

urine volume. In comparison, the American prescription drug Proscar™ (finasteride) showed a 30% decrease in symptom scores over three years, but urine flow improved only slightly, and residual urine volume was almost unchanged. Further, 10.7% of finasteride patients discontinued treatment because of side effects, compared to only 1.8% of those taking saw palmetto. Perhaps most important is the reported improvement in quality of life, "which was reflected in the over 80% 'good' to 'very good' efficacy judgments." Saw palmetto is approved by the German government as a treatment for BPH, as are extracts of nettle roots (*Urtica dioica* L., Urticaceae) and pumpkin seeds (*Cucurbita pepo* L., Cucurbitaceae). The proposed mechanisms of actions for these phytomedicines are regulation of hormone metabolism, immune system mediation, anticongestive actions, and effects on the muscles of the bladder.

The authors conclude that in terms of increasing urinary flow rate, "the data show a clear superiority of the sabal [saw palmetto] extract in comparison to the

synthetic drugs." For Proscar® (finasteride), only one-third of the treated patients had "clinically relevant improvement," and only after at least six months of treatment (n=533). They also note that one of the drugs used in conventional medicine, alfuzosin, produced a short-term improvement in the first year of the study, followed by a "striking" decline in the second year.

Clearly, saw palmetto offers superior symptomatic relief in prostate disease, as defined by the most common clinical tests. In addition, it improves quality of life and has a "practically negligible side effect risk." This review makes a compelling case for the use of saw palmetto as treatment of choice among physicians and patients concerned with meaningful improvement and greater safety compared with conventional synthetic drugs. As a side note, while cost was not a consideration in this review, saw palmetto extract is also significantly less expensive than conventional prescription drugs. **TH**

NEXTMONTH
in
Today's
HERBS

Brain Food
SHARPENING YOUR MIND
WITH NATURAL AGENTS

Fabulous Fiber
THE FACTS AND FICTION
BEHIND DIETARY FIBER