

Omega-3 Fatty Acids Help Fight Mental Illness

Fatty acids are the major building blocks of fats and important sources of energy in the human body. Essential fatty acids (EFAs) aid the body in many ways. As structural parts of cell membranes and the membranes of subcellular organelles, EFAs are indispensable.

At a recent conference sponsored by the NIH, it was announced that a higher consumption of EFAs, particularly omega-3, appears to be linked to a reduced risk of depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. A high consumption of omega-3 fatty acids also contributes to better outcome after treatment for the same conditions.

People deficient in EFAs can develop allergies, cardiovascular disorders, cholesterol problems, eczema, eyesight problems, immune deficiencies, learning difficulties, nerve problems, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis. The richest sources of omega-3 EFAs are salmon, halibut, mackerel and flaxseed oil.

Newsworthy:

A survey done by the American Medical Association says that 64 percent of U.S. medical schools now offer courses dealing with alternative medicine—acupuncture, chiropractics, and herbal therapies.

Diabetes—What Can Help?

There are various natural alternatives that can help in the fight against diabetes. Supplements cannot reverse the disease by themselves, but they do help strengthen the body and fight against the effects of diabetes. It is best to try to get these nutrients from food whenever possible, and if you already suffer from diabetes, consult with your doctor before taking supplements.

Vitamin C: Enhances capillary strength, which improves blood flow.

Vitamin E: An antioxidant that helps in the healing of diabetes-related lesions.

Vitamin A: Can help reduce the risk of blindness in diabetes.

Zinc: Taken daily, helps control blood-sugar levels.

Chromium: Improves the uptake of glucose into cells where it is used to produce energy. (Diabetics are usually chromium deficient.)

Magnesium: A deficiency of magnesium is common in diabetics.

Ginkgo biloba: Extracts of ginkgo stimulate blood flow and help reverse damage to arteries

Fish oils: Help improve insulin efficiency by enhancing blood flow and reducing the clumping of red blood cells.

Gymnea silvestre: This Ayurvedic medicine has been used in Africa and India for centuries to improve blood sugar levels.

Black Bean Soup

1 tablespoon canola oil

1 medium onion, chopped

1 medium green pepper, in 3/4 inch pieces

2 1/2 cups vegetable broth

1 cup long-grain white rice

1 10 oz. package frozen chopped collard greens

1 large carrot (or sweet potato) peeled and cut into 3/4 inch pieces
1 tsp. dried thyme leaves
1/4 tsp. ground allspice
1 15 oz. can black beans, rinsed and drained
salt and pepper

1. Heat oil in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onions and green pepper and saute until softened, about 3 minutes.
2. Add broth, rice, collard greens, carrot, thyme and allspice. Cover pot, bring to a boil, and reduce heat. Simmer until rice is done, about 15-20 minutes.
3. Mix in black beans and heat through. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

This dish can be tossed together in no time. It's a great way to introduce greens to your family and friends. My favorite greens are kale and col-lards because they're hardy enough to be cooked in the same pot with the pasta, which saves time and washing another pot. If you've a lawn of dandelion greens that are unsprayed, feel virtuous if you use them!

It's nice to know that garlic, in addition to all its other attributes, is said to lift mood and have a mild calming effect.

Serves 4

2 large bunches greens (use your favorites), rinsed and torn into bite-sized pieces
1 pound fettucine
1/2 cup olive oil
12 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup cooked cannellini beans or red kidney beans
1 cup pecorino Romano, grated
1 teaspoon black pepper
lemon wedges

Bring a large pot of water to boil. Add greens and stir until they just begin to soften, about a minute. Add pasta and cook until it is al dente, about 5-7 minutes.

In the meantime, gently warm olive oil in a skillet. Add garlic and saute. Add beans and simmer just until they're warmed through.

Drain pasta and greens into a colander. Place in large bowl and add oil and garlic mixture. Toss. Add Romano and black pepper and toss again.

Serve with extra bowl of Romano and pass lemon wedges at the table.

Variation: Soy or rice parmesan works well as a substitute for Romano here or in any recipe.

How to Prevent Breast Cancer

The January/February issue of Natural Health provides a list of thirteen simple things a woman can do to prevent breast cancer. Every woman should be aware of these preventive measures because the statistics are alarming: every American woman has a 1:8 chance of developing breast cancer in her life.

1. Seaweed

Japanese women have 1/3 the risk of breast cancer of American women. This may be explained by their high consumption of kelp (a type of seaweed). Kelp, chlorella and spirulina contain chlorophyll, which studies have shown to have anticarcinogenic effects. They also contain vitamin C and carotenoids, which fight free radicals.

2. Limit Fat Intake

Women should limit fat intake to 20 percent of their overall caloric intake. A diet high in fat is known to contribute to breast cancer. Japanese women who move to the U.S. have an increase in breast cancer as the fat in their diet increases. It is also thought that a high-fat diet produces chemicals in the intestine that convert to carcinogenic estrogens.

3. Fiber

Get plenty of fiber from fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains. Fiber interrupts the body's metabolism of estrogen and decreases estrogen blood levels. High levels of estrogen in the bloodstream correspond to a higher risk of breast cancer. High-fiber diets can decrease breast cancer risk by 54 percent.

4. Cruciferous Vegetables

Eat broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, turnips, kale, bok choy and cauliflower. These cruciferous vegetables contain indoles, compounds that eliminate estrogen from the body and prevent it from triggering the growth of breast cancer. Steam the vegetables or eat them raw to preserve their cancer-fighting nutrients.

5. Fatty Acids

Eat cold-water fish (halibut, salmon, mackerel, cod, sardines, haddock) or take fish oil capsules or algae-derived DHA supplements. A major British study showed that a high consumption of fish oil and fish was linked to fewer cases of cancer. In a study from Finland, women with breast cancer had lower levels of EPA and DHA, two omega-3 fatty acids. Eskimo women, who eat a diet extremely high in omega-3 fatty acids, have no breast cancer at all.

6. Soy

Soybeans and other soy products contain genistein, a natural plant estrogen that binds to receptors in the breast,

making it impossible for cancer-causing forms of estrogen to connect with the breast cells. Soy also decreases the development of blood vessels that feed a tumor, increases cancer cell death, and contains enzymes that break down carcinogens in the body.

7. Organic Foods

Whenever possible buy organic fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products, meat and poultry. Organic products are free of pesticides and other toxins that are linked to a higher rate of breast cancer. Dairy products and meats that are certified organic are free from bovine growth hormone, a chemical fed to cows that has been shown to promote the growth of breast cancer cells.

8. Supplements

Various supplements are known to help in the fight against breast cancer.

Astragalus: A 1990 study showed astragalus increases the body's ability to kill cancer cells tenfold.

Selenium: A 1989 study showed the higher the blood levels of selenium, the lower the rate of breast cancer.

CoQ 10: This nutrient protects against cancer by strengthening the immune system and fighting free radicals.

Grape seed extract: 20 times more powerful than vitamin C and 50 times more powerful than vitamin E at fighting free radicals.

Alpha-lipoic acid: A powerful antioxidant that strengthens and regenerates other antioxidants in the body.

9. Mushrooms

Medicinal mushroom, especially the Japanese varieties of maitake and shiitake, stimulate the immune function and may also inhibit tumor growth.

10. Green Tea

Green tea contains cancer-fighting antioxidants and polyphenols, which reduce the damage done by free radicals.

One study showed women who drank a lot of green tea—10 cups per day—had a significantly lower risk of cancer.

11. Oil

Cook with virgin or extra-virgin olive oil. A study in Spain showed that women with lower risk of breast cancer were consuming the most olive oil. Use flaxseed oil in dishes that aren't heated. Avoid canola oil, safflower oil, corn oil, soybean oil, sesame oil and margarine.

12. Phytonutrients

Phytonutrients are compounds that protect against cellular damage and inhibit cancer growth. They are found in a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, grains, seeds, nuts and legumes. A study done at Harvard showed women who ate the most vegetables had a 48 percent lower incidence of breast cancer than those who ate the least amount. Those who ate the most fruit had a 32 percent lower incidence than those who ate less fruit.

13. Allium

Allium is found in garlic, onions, leeks and shallots. The National Cancer Institute states that garlic is one of the best foods for protection against cancer. It contains selenium, which induces white blood cell production and induces cancer cell death. Onions and other allium vegetables offer similar therapeutic effects. For optimal results, eat the foods raw.

Along with these 13 suggestions, women should also get 4 hours of vigorous aerobic exercise a week. It also helps to stay within 12 pounds of your ideal body weight.

Tidy up that Bedroom

Psychologists believe that when we are surrounded by confusion, our minds become confused and anxious. More than any room in the house, the bedroom should be a refuge. Avoid having your bedroom double as a work area. If that is impossible, screen your work area off and don't answer the work phone after 5:00. Let an answering machine do it for you. Don't hide clutter under bed or in closets. Clean out that closet—get rid of anything you haven't worn in the last year. And avoid having a TV in your room.

Lycium Fruit

Lycium Fruit (gouqizi in Chinese) is a small Akberry grown in China. Its recorded use in China dates back to 100 A.D. Lycium contains polysaccharides that boost the body's ability to fight disease by activating proteins in the immune system. In recent years lycium fruit has been given to cancer patients and people who have AIDS. The fruit also has significant amounts of B1, B2 and vitamin C, which provide energy and promote immunity. The fruit also contains betaine, an alkaloid that helps produce choline which helps to strengthen the liver. In the U.S. lycium is available in capsules or pills, or you can buy the dried fruit. (It is often compared to raisins.) You can boil the fruit to make tea, or just peel and eat.

Qi Gong

Qi gong (pronounced chee gong) means "energy work." It is an ancient form of exercise that the Chinese believe balances the three elements of physical, mental and spiritual well-being. The exercises of qi gong help develop xing (posture), yi (consciousness), and qi (vital energy). Qi gong increases circulation, improves coordination, and tones and stretches muscles. Qi gong exercises are suitable for people of all ages and physical conditions. Beginners should work with an instructor. Call the National Qi Gong Association at 888-218-7788 for instructors in your area or get information online at www.nqa.org

Tempeh and Cholesterol

Tempeh is an ancient Indonesian food that is made from whole soybeans fermented with a grain such as rice or millet. Tempeh contains 19 percent protein and has as much fiber as a cup of brown rice. Because tempeh has undergone a fermentation process, our bodies can easily absorb its calcium, iron and zinc and use its protein efficiently.

Another important nutritional benefit of tempeh is that, like other soybean products, it works to lower cholesterol levels. A 1995 study showed that soy protein used in 38 controlled clinical trials reduced total cholesterol 9.3 percent. Many researchers believe that it is the combination of soy proteins and the isoflavones found in soy that are responsible for the cholesterol-lowering effects.

A recent study in which creatine was found to boost muscle strength in those afflicted with muscle-wasting diseases such as muscular dystrophy may also be good news for the elderly.

One of the most debilitating symptoms of aging is a loss of muscle strength, and consequently, independence. An inability to climb stairs or to walk even a short distance without resting can make independent living impossible. One cause of this muscle degeneration is a reduced level of creatine in aging muscles – the same characteristic found in younger patients with neuromuscular diseases such as muscular dystrophy, according to Dr. Mark Tarnopolsky, MD, Ph.D.

Dr. Tarnopolsky recently led a study at McMaster University Medical Center in Hamilton, Ontario, which found positive results on 81 patients with neuromuscular diseases after a 10-day regimen of creatine in powder form. Results of the study were published in the March 10 issue of the journal *Neurology*, a publication of the American Academy of Neurology, of St. Paul, Minnesota.

In the study, the patients were tested at the beginning and end of the 10-day period to measure strength gains. On average, the patients exhibited improvements of 10 to 15% in hand, foot and leg strength. Along with the muscle strength, these patients also experienced weight gains and an increase in lean muscle mass.

Creatine is actually a combination of two amino acids, and is produced mostly in the liver. It is also found in lean red meat and fish. Once in the body, creatine is carried in the blood to skeletal muscles, the heart, and the brain. Dr. Tarnopolsky describes creatine's function as "giving one a bridge between one energy source and another," allowing for "higher energy output over a longer period of time."

While there is certainly more research to be done, the McMaster University study offers much hope for those whose natural levels of creatine have been depleted, either through age or disease.

References:

Tarnopolsky M, et al. Creatine monohydrate increases strength in patients with neuromuscular disease. *Neurology*. 1999 Mar 10;52(4):854-7.

UPI Science News CHICAGO, March 2 (UPI) Ancient Chinese medicine has been combined with leading-edge Western technology to create an easy-to-learn, high tech acupuncture that can cure chronic back pain. Researchers are reporting a new approach to acupuncture allows Western doctors to use what they know about the nervous system to deliver pain-killing electrical impulses to a painful spot on the body.

Scientists from the University of Texas Medical Center at Dallas say that by putting the pain-killing agent at points Western doctors know are nerve centers, they do not have to take the time to learn the complex system of acupuncture used in China and many parts of Asia.

In traditional acupuncture, practitioners must learn hundreds of spots on the body from head to toe where needles can be inserted and manipulated at different depths to stop pain.

Next to the common cold, lower back pain is the most common malady in the United States. More than 80 percent of the population will suffer from an aching back sometimes in their life. The system uses a steel needle slightly thicker than a human hair through which a very low electrical current is delivered to the pain area. UT researcher Dr. Paul White says, 'It is not painful because the needles are so thin you don't feel them.' White and his colleagues publish their findings in Wednesday's issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. He says that when the electricity is turned on the treatment produces what patients describe as a deep massage.

The technique, known as PENS, for Percutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation, was tried on 60 otherwise healthy patients who had severe lower back pain. The patients got nine or 10 treatments, three times a week for three weeks. Pain was reduced from 50 to 90 percent and patients returned for further treatment every week or every month, as needed. White says that even when pain starts to come back it never reaches the severe level it was at before the first treatment. White says he believes that the electrical treatment changes the pain path. The technique was found to be more effective than other types of electrical nerve stimulation because it takes the current past the protective barrier of the skin. It also was better at relieving pain than exercise therapy.

White says the method is better for patients than prescription anti-pain drugs and is more effective than over-the-counter pain medications such as aspirin. White says his treatment has no adverse side effects, and adds that he has already found his electric needles effective at controlling neck pain and sciatica, some types of migraines and even pain from some metastatic cancers. While the technique is not yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration, approval is expected within the next two months, White says. He also said that Blue Cross and Blue Shield as well as some other medical plans are willing to pay for the \$100 or \$200 treatments, even though the system is still experimental.