

Naturopathic News *of the* Northwest

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Sunset Salad

Submitted by Tracy Cook, ND

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Vitamin D, The Sunshine Vitamin

By Trisha Cordes, ND

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin that functions as a hormone precursor in our bodies. It has many roles in our bodies including:

- Enhancing the intestinal absorption of calcium and phosphorus
- Promoting healthy bones
- Plays a role in neuromuscular function
- Influences cell growth
- May help prevent infections and autoimmune diseases



Sources & Supplementation (Vitamin D2 or Vitamin D3)?

For humans, vitamin D3 is the natural form. It occurs naturally, in this form, in oily fish (such as salmon, mackerel and sardines) and, in small amounts in a few other foods (for example: cheese, egg yolk, and beef liver). Vitamin D3 is also synthesized in our skin after exposure to sunlight.

Facts about Vitamin D

- 15 minutes of direct sunlight on exposed skin twice a week generally produces enough vitamin D to meet our body's needs
- Sunscreen use can reduce vitamin D production by the skin by over 99%
- During winter months or when sun exposure is limited, vitamin D supplementation is recommended
- People with darker skin or advancing age have decreased vitamin D production
- 7 out of 10 Canadians **do not** meet the suggested minimum vitamin D level for optimal health (*Statistics Canada, Health Reports. Vol. 21, no.1, March 2010*). Canadians do not receive enough sunlight to make vitamin D for 4-5 months of the year.

Some medications may contribute to lower vitamin D levels in your body:

- Anticonvulsant medications
- Medication for treating tuberculosis (ie: isoniazid and rifampicin)
- Bile salt sequestrants (such as cholestyramin and colestipol)
- Glucocorticoids
- Statin medications

It has been estimated that 37,000 deaths each year could be prevented if the Canadian average vitamin D level was 105 nmol/L (Mol Nutr Food Res. 2010;54:172-74)

Low levels of vitamin D in the body have been linked to:

- Anxiety
- Autoimmune disease
- Cancers
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- Muscle pain and fatigue
- Poor immune response

How do I know if my Vitamin D levels are optimal?

Ask your Naturopath for a D-spot test (25-hydroxyvitamin D - a convenient blood spot test). The **best time for testing** is at the *end of August or September*, when vitamin D levels are usually at their peak OR at the *end of March or April*, when vitamin D levels are usually at their lowest.

Naturopathic Pain Management

By Jordan Sokoloski, ND

There is no denying that pain is a disagreeable experience that we all hope to avoid whenever possible. However, despite our aversion to it, more than 50 million North Americans experience chronic pain including back pain, headache and joint pain caused by arthritis. While pain often serves a purpose, like warning of an injury, too often pain is experienced long term and without an easily identifiable cause.

Researchers are only now beginning to understand the complex and multidimensional nature of pain. Our perception of pain involves not just our awareness of it, but also our body's response to it. This response is mediated by many complicated and interconnected pathways in the body and is collectively known as "nociception." The impact of pain is further complicated by the social, emotional, and psychological factors which are especially prevalent when dealing with chronic pain. Those who suffer from chronic pain are often impaired in their ability to initiate or maintain fundamental daily activities such as eating, cleaning, or grocery shopping which is isolating and further impacts quality of life. Depression is not an uncommon experience for many who suffer from chronic pain.

In the case of pain, effective naturopathic management begins with a detailed assessment. This allows for careful characterization of the pain and its impact. Because pain is subjective, only the patient can adequately describe it, including its precise location, severity, and quality. What activities is the pain interfering with? Does it affect sleep, exercise, or enjoyment of a hobby? Prior pain treatments, both conventional and complementary will be discussed, including a review of all current medications and supplements.

The goal is to try to understand the mechanism of the pain. Is it caused by a structural problem, such as a bulging disc in the spine? Is it due to damage or poor functioning of nerves or other tissues, such as muscles? Has there been a recent injury or surgery? How severe is the inflammation? Inflammation can be a normal consequence of an active immune system, but too much inflammation in the wrong place can be problematic.

The foundations of health are always emphasized as a part of treatment. The first of these is proper diet and nutrition. Poor nutrition can contribute to a host of problems in the body, including chronic pain. A thorough assessment of diet is undertaken as an important part of a pain management program. Proper diet and identification of food sensitivities has been shown to decrease inflammation and the pain associated with several different diseases and syndromes.

The second foundation of health is stress management. Identifying one's triggers is just as important as learning ways to increase resilience to stress. Observing our thoughts and emotions can help us learn a lot about the ways we typically react to a stressful situation. Over time, we come to understand how our bodies cope with stress and to learn more effective ways of responding to stressors.

Sunset Salad



2 grated raw carrots
1 peeled and grated raw beet

Dressing: juice of one lemon, 1/2 tsp finely minced ginger, 1/2 tsp honey, 1 Tbsp olive or flaxseed oil

Submitted by Tracy Cook, ND

Finally, the third foundation of health is regular exercise.

Exercise does not need to be intense.

Stretching or walking may be the most appropriate forms of exercise for you and these moderate forms of activity are often all that is needed to promote healing as well as relieve stress. In pain management, the emphasis is often on "functional movements," which are exercises designed to improve our ability to complete tasks we often encounter in everyday situations.

Physical medicine techniques can be very effective for managing all types of pain. Acupuncture with electrical stimulation at specific points affects nerves in order to decrease pain perception and improve movement. Even pain due to an intractable structural cause can often be positively impacted through acupuncture's effects on the nervous system. Friction or massage over a painful area also stimulates nerves to improve their function and increases circulation to the area to facilitate healing.

Stretching or strengthening tightened or weakened muscles can relieve pressure on sensitive structures and reduce pain caused by postural issues. Hydrotherapy, or the use of water at different temperatures to stimulate immunity and circulation, also has effective applications in terms of management of pain.

In short, there is not one perfect solution that will work for every case. One of Naturopathic Medicine's strengths lies in the individualized treatment approach undertaken with each patient.

A chronic pain diagnosis can be stressful, but there are options available that can positively impact your quality of life.

Naturopathic pain management offers an array of different approaches to pain that can be used in conjunction with those medicines and therapies prescribed by your medical doctor. If you have more questions about Naturopathic Medicine and its approach to pain management, please do not hesitate to call the Thunder Bay Naturopathic Clinic to schedule a free consultation.

Do you have **Extended Healthcare Benefits**
that can be used before the end of 2014?

See your Naturopathic Doctor about
optimizing health for the whole family
before Cold & Flu season is here.

Fish Oil Supplements During Pregnancy

By Cindi Nabb, ND

Fish oils contain two omega-3 essential fatty acids (EFAs); Docahexaenoic Acid (DHA) and Eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA). These fatty acids have been shown to be important for human health and development, including pregnancy and fetal development. Studies have shown that using fish oils during pregnancy can result in higher birth weights and decreased risk of preterm delivery.

During fetal development, the rapid cell growth and organ development requires large amounts of fatty acids which are supplied only by the mother. DHA has been associated with the development of the central nervous system, the brain, the eyes, and the immune system. Inadequate levels of DHA throughout fetal development, infancy, and childhood can result in improper formation of any of these organs and body systems. For example, children born to mothers who supplemented with EFAs during pregnancy and lactation showed higher scores on IQ tests at age 4 compared to those who didn't.

The demands for EFAs for cognitive development do not end when babies are born. Cognitive and brain development continues well into childhood, extending the need for adequate DHA consumption. While infants are breastfeeding, this demand is met through breast milk and the amount of EFAs found in breast milk is dependent on maternal levels. The mother should continue to take



fish oils throughout lactation to ensure infants are receiving sufficient levels.

Not only are EFAs beneficial for the baby's health, but they can also be beneficial for maternal health throughout the prenatal and postnatal period. EPA and DHA have been shown to improve mood and decrease the frequency and the severity of post-partum depression. They have also been shown to decrease the risk of preeclampsia, edema, and pregnancy-induced hypertension.

Fish is the primary source of the fatty acids EPA and DHA, however, consumption of fish in pregnancy should be cautious. Large predatory fish such as albacore tuna, shark, and sword fish should be avoided due to their potential for mercury and other toxins. Review the Health Canada website for a full list of fish that are safe for regular consumption and talk to your Naturopathic Doctor about supplementing with fish oils and EFAs to keep you and your growing baby healthy and happy.

Naturopathic Fertility-boosting and Pre-conception Care

By Jessica Carfagnini, ND

While it's true that some women get pregnant easily once they decide it's time to have a baby, many others are left "trying" for months or even years without any success. This can be extremely difficult emotionally, physically and financially, especially when medical interventions such as IVF (in vitro fertilization) are called upon. Naturopathic medicine can help both women and men to optimize their fertility and increase their chances of conceiving while also setting the stage for a healthy pregnancy and baby. As a naturopathic doctor, I strive to address the root cause of the infertility, remove any obstacles to conception, and develop an individualized treatment plan for each patient.

There are a vast number of tools that I use to help my patients boost their fertility and prepare for a healthy pregnancy. Here are just a few examples:

Clinical Nutrition:

- Food sensitivities can cause digestive problems and chronic inflammation which in turn have a negative impact on fertility. An IgG food sensitivity test can pinpoint specific foods that are a problem for each individual.
- Oral contraceptive pills deplete vitamin B6, so any women with a history of using "the pill" should take B6.
- Other vitamin deficiencies that are common and can interfere with fertility include iron and vitamin D.
- CoQ10 is an excellent antioxidant to take that has been documented to preserve egg quality, especially in women over 35 years of age.
- Drinking green tea can increase fertile cervical mucous, which has an essential role in nourishing sperm and shunting it towards the egg.

Herbal medicine:

- Vitex is a powerful herb for regulating the menstrual cycle and balancing hormones.
- The traditional "fertility tea" that I often prescribe has helpful herbs such as nettle for nutrient repletion, red raspberry leaf for tonifying the uterus, and red clover for estrogen balance.

Traditional Chinese Medicine:

- TCM offers a wide variety of herbal formulas and acupuncture points for optimizing fertility that must be applied as part of an individualized treatment plan. What this means is that there is no "one-size-fits-all" treatment plan. Not only are there specific acupuncture points for each phase of the menstrual cycle, but these points differ depending on the woman's overall constitution and underlying health issues. Acupuncture is also a great way to relieve the stress and anxiety that can accompany fertility challenges.
- Pregnancy and parenthood take a lot of emotional, spiritual and physical energy. Anyone undertaking these challenges deserves to be in the best health possible before and during these life transitions. I am always thrilled to be able to treat both parents-to-be well in advance of conception, so that other health issues can be dealt with ahead of time. This makes it easier to conceive, reduces stress, and increases quality of life for the whole family! If you are curious what naturopathic medicine may have to offer you, please book a free 10 minute consultation with one of your local NDs.

Healing takes courage, and we all have courage, even if we have to dig a little to find it.

~Tori Amos

Digestive Enzymes 101

By Kimberly Traverse, ND

I started my journey in healthcare as a Nutritionist, and it has taught me the incredible importance of a healthy digestive system. Just because we eat something does not always mean that we receive all the theoretical benefits from that food – the gut must be able to assimilate it. When the cells that line the gastrointestinal (GI) tract have been chronically inflamed there are changes to the amount and efficiency of the enzymes that they secrete. These enzymes are the first steps in a complex process of splitting, emulsifying and transporting nutrients from our food into our circulation for use.

Most of the enzymes of digestion are made in the pancreas or along the border of the small intestine – but since digestion is a dynamic cascade of reactions that begins in the mouth, dysfunction at any part of the upper GI can result in impaired digestion throughout. Stool analysis testing is the most objective measure of enzyme production and secretion, but is not a regular screening procedure used in most medical clinics and is often expensive. My patients know that an extremely thorough bowel history and diet diary is invaluable when determining which organs of digestion are doing their job and which could use some support.

Symptoms of poor enzyme production can be highly variable, given that there are several glands and organs involved. Perhaps the most pronounced symptom of low enzymes is a feeling of fullness after just a few bites of food, the sensation of heaviness or hardness (a “rock”) in the stomach for more than one hour after eating. Undigested food in the stool is also a big clue.

Along with a complete health history, symptoms like these can sometimes warrant use of supplemental digestive enzymes to replace those that the gut is not producing and will give the glands and organs a slight reprieve. Giving these tissues a break can allow healing to occur. Here, enzymes are being taken to induce a particular metabolic process, (ie. like a drug) and this is usually best kept temporary. Overdosing or using them chronically can prevent the glands from reestablishing balanced use over time.

There are many brands and formulas containing digestive enzymes found over the counter. Almost all of them will contain plant or synthetic derived enzymes that emulsify fat (lipase), catabolize sugar (amylase, lactase) and proteins (protease) as well as bromelain (from pineapple) and papain (from papaya). When being used for digestion, enzymes should **always** be taken before eating. Proteases taken on an empty stomach can erode the protein that make up the gut over time, likely worsening any associated conditions.

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