



# PANTRY Post

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SEPTEMBER, 2006  
Volume 1, Issue 10

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## Forthcoming Events

As we move toward the hoped for sunny autumn, you might wish to look out for the various events around the Soil Association Organic Fortnight from 2-17 September, with the Organic Experience Weekend on 9-10 September.

This is followed by the South Somerset Food Festival 30 September to 8 October. For the latter we are arranging for some of our existing as well as new suppliers to offer tastings, so do come in and try their local produce.



## Still Growing Organic

The Soil Association's recently published report on the global organic food and drink market shows that two out of three consumers now knowingly buy organic food. This increase in the number and range of consumers led to a 30% increase in UK organic sales in 2005, with those through independent shops, farm shops, farmers' markets and box schemes increasing by 32% - not surprising as research earlier this year showed the majority of organic consumers preferred to shop at smaller local suppliers!

## Of Nuts and Olive Oil

There have been many comments over the years about the benefit of a Mediterranean diet and a recent Spanish clinical trial found that eating one with extra nuts or olive oil is significantly better for heart health than a low-fat diet.

Commenting on the results, researcher Dr. Emilio Ros, from the Hospital Clinic of Barcelona said: "The results to date make us believe, long term, the Mediterranean diet enriched with walnuts or olive oil will indeed reduce heart disease."



The Mediterranean diet is rich in cereals, fruits, legumes and whole grains, fish and olive oil, has been well publicised for its potential to promote a longer life, prevent heart disease, and protect against certain types of cancer. The diet's main nutritional components include beta-carotene, vitamin C, tocopherols, polyphenols, and essential minerals.

One group was assigned a low-fat diet, and the other two groups a Mediterranean diet - one was

given additional virgin olive oil (one litre per week), and the second Mediterranean diet group additional nuts (30 grams per day).

Compared to the low-fat diet subjects, the researchers found that both Mediterranean diets resulted in significant benefits for plasma glucose levels, systolic blood pressure and the ratio of total cholesterol to HDL (good) cholesterol.

The Mediterranean diet with the olive oil group also showed significant reductions in the levels of C-reactive protein, a pro-inflammatory protein linked to heart

disease. The researchers concluded "Compared to a low-fat diet, Mediterranean diets supplemented with olive oil or nuts have beneficial effects on cardiovascular risk factors". Dr. Ros added: "We expect it to reduce the rates of heart attacks and strokes and other cardiovascular diseases by 50 per cent . . . I'm saying that a diet that incorporates walnuts will surely reduce the risk of heart disease in the long term."



## Even Nuttier!

Need another reason to snack on nuts? A recent study in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* showed that pistachios and sunflower seeds may be the best choices for those wishing to lower their cholesterol levels!

The study analysed the cholesterol-lowering phytosterol content of 27 different nuts and seeds. The clear-cut winners of the study were wheat germ and sesame seeds because they contained the highest overall level of phytosterols. But the researchers found that most people do not eat enough of these for them to be good choices for those looking to cut their cholesterol. The most practical nutty snack they found would be the third and fourth place finishers - pistachios and sunflower seeds. Others that ranked high on their list include pumpkin seeds, pine nuts, almonds, macadamia nuts, black walnuts, pecans, cashews, peanuts, and hazelnuts.



## Inflammation - Possible Natural Remedies

Anti-inflammatories are some of the most commonly used drugs available today, being taken for everything from arthritis to headaches. However, in recent years these drugs have come under increased scrutiny and recently two separate papers appeared in the *British Medical* and *European Heart Journals*, reporting an increased risk of heart attacks associated with the use of these drugs.

Perhaps most worryingly, the *British Medical Journal* report showed that even Ibuprofen, the most commonly available anti-inflammatory drug, could increase the risk of a heart attack, vascular disease, or stroke by up to 40%. Another concern is the effect that these drugs may have on impotence. Arthritis has been linked to an increased risk of impotence for some time, but a report in the *Journal of Urology* suggests that instead of the actual disease being the culprit, the anti-inflammatories used to 'help' the condition may play more of a role. On top of this, several anti-inflammatories are associated with more common problems such as stomach irritation and ulcers.

Many arthritis sufferers rely heavily on anti-inflammatories to control pain, but if this

increasing body of evidence proves to be accurate then alternatives may need to be sought. Many experts have advocated natural remedies as being equal to, if not better than, drugs such as ibuprofen. These include:

**Glucosamine sulphate** - although glucosamine does not act directly as an anti-inflammatory, it is important in the maintenance and repair of joints. In this respect it has been seen to have benefits for those who have swelling in and around joints either through injury or conditions such as arthritis. Several studies have shown that in the long run glucosamine use is more effective than ibuprofen at reducing swelling and pain associated with joints. Although vegetarian glucosamine is now available, most comes from shellfish.



**MSM** - is a naturally occurring, organic, sulphur-containing compound that is found in small amounts throughout nature. The biochemistry of MSM and its actions are poorly understood, but it is thought to have a two-fold action both helping with the formation of connective tissue in the joints, plus having a more direct anti-inflammatory action of its own, some Glucosamine supplements include MSM.



**Arnica** - research has shown it to have anti-inflammatory properties, though it has fallen out of favour with some following a highly publicised study that showed homeopathic arnica being

no more effective than a placebo (an issue also surrounding Devil's Claw) at reducing swelling in patients with carpal tunnel syndrome; although another unpublished study has reported arnica gel to be more effective than ibuprofen gel. Arnica in herb form should not be ingested, but apart from that it is thought to be relatively safe. Do not apply to broken skin.

**Turmeric** - one of the key ingredients in many curries, the root and rhizome of the plant are used medicinally. Turmeric is thought to reduce inflammation by lowering histamine levels and possibly by increasing production of natural cortisone by the adrenal glands. A preliminary trial in people with rheumatoid arthritis found curcumin, contained within turmeric, to be somewhat useful for reducing inflammation and symptoms such as pain and stiffness. A separate double-blind trial found that curcumin was superior to placebo or phenylbutazone (a prescribed anti-inflammatory) for alleviating post-surgical inflammation. Unlike some other anti-inflammatories, turmeric has been seen to help with some stomach complaints. It is also available as a tincture.



**Bromelain** - is a digestive enzyme derived from the stem of pineapples. Double-blind research has found bromelain effective in reducing swelling, bruising, and preliminary research suggests it helps patients with rheumatoid arthritis. One preliminary report however indicates increased heart rate with the use of bromelain; additionally, some people are allergic to it.

**Chondroitin sulphate** - much like glucosamine sulphate, the main anti-inflammatory effects of chondroitin are not thought to be direct, but rather as a major constituent of cartilage (the spongy bit that protects bones at joints) it not only provides structure, but also holds water and nutrients - vitally important as cartilage does not have its own blood supply. It has been shown, in numerous double-blind trials, to relieve the symptoms and pain associated with osteoarthritis and there are few concerns over its safety, although there may be an issue for men with prostate cancer. Unlike glucosamine, there is no vegetarian source of chondroitin - it is only found in animal cartilage.

**New Zealand green-lipped mussels** - green lipped mussel extract has been shown in numerous studies to help reduce the pain and swelling associated with arthritis. Some people have been known to react adversely to certain types of mussel extract and people with a shellfish allergy should be wary.

**Boswellia** - from a purified resin extract taken from an Indian tree; studies have shown that boswellic acids have an anti-inflammatory action. Long-term use of boswellia does not appear to cause irritation or ulceration of the stomach.



## More on Trans Fats

A recent report from the National Academy of Sciences in the United States attempted to set a safe intake level for trans-fatty acids. Its conclusion confirmed previous findings about the relationship of trans-fatty acids and the risk of heart disease, and concluded with this recommendation: "The only safe intake of trans fat is zero."

That assessment was confirmed again in another study that appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine. The team from the Harvard School of Medicine came to the conclusion: Adverse effects of trans-fats are "far stronger on average than the negative effects of pesticide residues or food contaminants." The report notes that in addition to the adverse effect on raising LDL (bad) cholesterol and lowering HDL (good) cholesterol and creating a higher risk of coronary heart disease and sudden cardiac death, they were also linked to a significantly higher risk of developing type-2 diabetes.

Trans fats are everywhere in the typical Western diet. Deep-fried foods, margarines, bakery products and snack foods are the primary sources of trans or hydrogenated fats. According to one estimate, 40 per cent of products in the typical US supermarket contain trans fat, and the UK is not far behind.

The 2003 Danish government report on Trans Fatty Acids states that, gramme for gramme, trans fats are 10 times more harmful to cardiovascular health than the saturated fats we are constantly reminded to eat less of! The UK government's policy is to try to reduce saturated fat intake, and ignore trans fats, this despite a recent editorial in the British Medical Journal calling for them to be labeled.

## Keep Active

A new study by the University of Washington suggests that those who are better at performing certain physical tasks are at lower risk of dementia.

Over 2000 patients aged 65 or older were enrolled in the study and given physical tests, such as a timed walk or a gripping task. Tested again after six years, those who scored the lowest in the physical tasks were found to be three times more likely to develop dementia and Alzheimer's compared to subjects who were in excellent physical shape.

Study leader, Dr Eric Larson said: "We were surprised to find that physical changes can

precede declines in thinking . . . If confirmed, this study might also help explain the association of physical exercise with a reduced risk of dementia, suggesting that exercise, by improving and maintaining physical function, might benefit cognitive function through a connection between the two." He added: "Physical and mental performance may go hand in hand, and anything you can do to improve one is likely to improve the other."

Rarely, dementia can be reversed, for example if it is due to thyroid hormone deficiency or deficiency of vitamin B-12 or folic acid. Suffice to say remember to keep up the intake of folic acid with dark green



vegetables, brewers yeast, lima beans, cantaloupe melon, watermelon, wheatgerm and liver. It is possible for a high intake of folate to mask a vitamin B-12 deficiency in older people, so keep up your B-12 levels by eating plenty of meat, fish and eggs, or by taking B-12 supplements.

So aim to be one of the 40 per cent of the world's population who meets the World Health Organization recommendation of the minimum 30 minutes moderate-intensity physical activity each day.

This activity, for example brisk walking, is enough to bring many benefits - increasing the level of activity will also increase them!

## Hurrah for cocoa

A study conducted in Holland reports that cocoa may lower your blood pressure and reduce mortality! The study began in 1985 and the researchers tabulated how much cocoa the men consumed - the top chocoholics consumed more than four grammes a day!



The men who consumed the most cocoa on a daily basis had lower blood pressure and a 50 percent lower risk of death than those who ingested less cocoa. The thing to remember here is a little goes a long way as four grammes is about the equivalent of a single chunk of chocolate, whereas an entire standard chocolate bar is about 40 grammes.

Small amounts or not, you are still better off bypassing the high sugar chocolate bars and their cousins altogether. Try opting for the high-quality dark chocolate or cocoa powder from the likes of Green & Blacks or Organica.

New research from Germany has also suggested cocoa improves skin conditions in women - thickening the skin and reducing by 25% reddening caused by ultra violet light!

## Snippets

**CoQ10** - researchers at New York's Albert Einstein College of Medicine have found that women taking the oral contraceptive pill could have lower levels of CoQ10 and vitamin E. Blood samples revealed serum levels of CoQ10 were 37% and vitamin E 24% lower. Both help neutralise free radicals which can cause oxidative damage to the body and contribute to conditions such as heart disease.

**Vitamin K** - studies regarding vitamin K and bone health have found that supplementation is associated with increased bone mineral density and reduced fracture incidence - there was an incredible 80 per cent reduction in hip fractures following vitamin K supplementation. A review of the findings by the American Medical Association suggested that individuals at risk of fracture be encouraged to consume a vitamin K rich diet. Vitamin K comes in two forms - K1 which is found in green leafy vegetables such as lettuce, broccoli and spinach, and K2 which can be synthesised in the gut by microflora. It can also be found in the diet in animal meat and fermented food products like cheese.

**Varicose veins** - a recent paper in *Advances in Therapy* showed that two weeks after taking A. Vogel's Aesculus tablets, a decrease in ankle circumference had occurred for those suffering stage one and two chronic venous insufficiency.