

[IMAGE]

No to Drugs, Yes to Nutrition

By Ronald Klatz, MD, DO

Pharmaceutical companies spend billions every year to convince us drugs are the only answer when our health is in jeopardy. Fortunately, research and experience are proving otherwise. We're finally waking up to the dangers of medication and the health benefits of natural alternatives.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly one in five Americans will be age 65 or older by the year 2030. This age group is projected to increase to 88.5 million in 2050, more than double the number in 2008 (38.7 million). And the 85-and-older population is expected to more than *triple* between now and 2050, from 5.4 million to 19 million.

As life expectancy continues to increase, older Americans face new and growing challenges to their health, productivity and independence. Where do they turn? For too long, the answer has been drugs, at least according to the pharmaceutical industry and the conventional medical profession. But all that may be changing.

In September 2008, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a report that confirmed the hazards of pharmaceuticals. According to the FDA, there were more than 450,000 adverse event reports (AERs) filed for life-threatening injuries resulting from prescription medications over a six-month period in 2008. By contrast, there were just 604 AERs reported for nutritional supplements during the same time frame.

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark With that said, it's important that we appreciate the perspective of Carl C. Pfeiffer, MD, PhD, researcher, author and founding director of the Brain Bio Center (Princeton, N.J.), who said, "For every drug that benefits a patient, there is a natural substance that can achieve the same effect."

Research is increasingly demonstrating the value of natural, nontoxic, nutritionally-based preventive approaches and interventional therapies, particularly for the purpose of prolonging a healthy, productive lifespan. In this article, let's review recent study findings that validate the safety and efficacy of various nutritional supplements for the prevention and treatment of aging-related diseases.

Don't Run Short on Vitamin D

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark At Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, researchers have completed a study suggesting that low blood levels of vitamin D are associated with a 26 percent increased risk of death from any cause. Erin Michos and colleagues analyzed data collected during a six-year period from 13,331 adults, after which the study subjects were followed for nine additional years. People with vitamin D levels of less than 17.8 ng/mL had a 26 percent increased rate of death from any cause, compared to people with the highest vitamin D levels (more than 32.1 ng/mL).

Low vitamin D status also has been suggested as a risk factor for type 2 diabetes. Paul Knekt, from the National Public Health Institute (Finland) and colleagues completed a study involving men and women ages 40 to 74 years, all of whom did not have diabetes at the study's start. Researchers followed the participants for 22 years. As reported in the September 2007 issue of *Epidemiology*, men with the highest serum vitamin D levels were the least likely to develop type 2 diabetes later in life. The researchers explained that inadequate intake of vitamin D interferes with insulin secretion: "The results support the hypothesis that high vitamin D status provides protection against type 2 diabetes."

- Good food sources of vitamin D: fortified milk, cod liver oil, salmon.

Remember Your Omega-3

- Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Upwards of 12 million people in the United States and the European Union suffer from Alzheimer's disease, and millions more are affected by mild age-related cognitive impairment. Following on two studies published in April 2007 in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* that reported regular consumption of foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids was effective in preventing age-related cognitive decline, Chih-Chiang Chiu, from Taipei City Hospital (Taiwan), and colleagues found that omega-3s actually provide therapeutic benefits for the condition. The team studied 23 people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease and 23 people with mild cognitive decline; a segment of each group received 1.8 grams of omega-3 per day for 24 weeks. The researchers concluded: "Omega-3 fatty acids may improve general clinical function in patients with mild or moderate Alzheimer's disease and mild cognitive impairment."

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of legal blindness for people age 55-plus in the Western world. There are two types of AMD - wet and dry, with the latter occurring more frequently.

Astrid Fletcher, from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (United Kingdom), and colleagues found that an increased consumption of omega-3 fatty acids also slashes the risk of AMD. People who ate at least one serving of oily fish per week had a 50 percent reduction in the risk of developing wet AMD, said the researchers, compared to people who consumed less than one portion per week. People who consumed at least 300 mg per day of DHA and EPA were 68 and 71 percent less likely, respectively, to have wet AMD than those with lower consumption.

- Good food sources of omega-3 fatty acids: mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna and salmon.

Reduce the Pressure With Potassium

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark High blood pressure is among the most important public health challenges. More than 70 million Americans are estimated to have hypertension, but less than half achieve blood pressure control. A study led by Mark C. Houston, MD, reports that increased intake of potassium, (and possibly magnesium and calcium) by dietary means may reduce the risk of high blood pressure and decrease blood pressure in people with hypertension. High intake of these minerals also may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke.

According to the study, published in the *Journal of Clinical Hypertension*, if Americans were able to increase their potassium intake, the number of adults with known hypertension with blood pressure levels higher than 140/90 mm Hg might decrease by more than 10 percent and increase life expectancy. Similar studies show that diets high in magnesium (at least 500 to 1,000 mg/d) and calcium (more than 800 mg/d) may also be associated with both a decrease in blood pressure and risk of developing hypertension. Commented Dr. Houston: "If we were to achieve the correct potassium/sodium ratio through dietary means, there would be less hypertension and cardiovascular disease in the population as a whole."

- Good food sources of potassium: sweet potatoes, tomato paste, soybeans, bananas.
- Good food sources of magnesium: pumpkin seeds, Brazil nuts, spinach, unrefined grains.

A Little Dark Chocolate for the Heart

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark According to the World Health Organization (WHO), cardio-vascular disease, which includes the specific diseases of heart attacks, heart failure and high blood pressure (hypertension), accounts for 30 percent of deaths worldwide. Dark chocolate contains high

concentrations of flavonoids, a potent antioxidant compound. Romina di Giuseppe, from the Laboratory of Genetic and Environmental Epidemiology at Catholic University (Campobasso, Italy), and colleagues evaluated the anti-inflammatory properties of dark chocolate in a group of 5,000 study participants in generally good health. Researchers collected the subjects' dietary habits via food surveys and measured serum levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a blood marker of inflammation. The team determined that CRP levels were 17 percent lower in the study subjects who consumed dark chocolate as compared to those who did not consume any at all.

As reported in the October 2008 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition*, the researchers found: "Consumers of up to 1 serving (20 g) of dark chocolate every 3 days had serum CRP concentrations that were significantly lower than nonconsumers or higher consumers. Our findings suggest that regular consumption of small doses of dark chocolate may reduce inflammation." According to the team, these reductions in CRP translate into a 33 percent risk reduction of cardiovascular disease in women and a 26 percent risk reduction in men.

Calcium: Not Just for Strong Bones and Teeth

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States and Europe and is a significant cause of long-term disability. To investigate the association between calcium intake and risk of cardiovascular disease (including stroke), Mitsumasa Umesawa, from the University of Tsukuba (Japan), and colleagues followed 41,526 Japanese men and women (ages 40 to 59 at the study's start) for 13 years. Men and women who consumed the highest calcium from all dietary sources lowered their risk of stroke by 30 percent, reported the study, published in the July 17, 2008 issue of *Stroke*.

- Good food sources of calcium: fortified cereal, plain yogurt, cheese.

Your doctor can provide you with more information on how sound nutrition can positively influence your health and well-being. For comprehensive listings of good food sources of these and other nutrients, search the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Nutrient Data Laboratory online (www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search).

Ronald Klatz, MD, is the president of the American Academy of Anti-Aging (www.worldhealth.net), a nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention, detection and treatment of aging-related disease.

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