Good Nutrition May Help Prevent Hearing Loss

Q. Can diet affect my hearing?

A. A few studies do suggest that getting enough of certain nutrients may reduce the risk of age-related hearing loss, which affects about one-third of Americans by age 65, one-half by 75.

Can Folic Acid Fix Hearing? Most recently, a study from the Netherlands found a promising link to the B vitamin folic acid. In a group of 728 older men and women, those who received a daily supplement of 800 micrograms (twice the Daily Value) for three years experienced a small, but significant slowing of an age-related decline in hearing. However, not all studies have found such a link.

Moreover, the people in the Dutch study had elevated blood levels of homocysteine, a risk factor for heart disease that may also be a risk factor for hearing loss. Folic acid is known to lower blood homocysteine by about 25%. While enriched grains are fortified with folic acid in the U.S., they aren't in the Netherlands, so supplemental folic acid is more likely to make a difference there than here.

Bringing in B12? Another study, from the University of Georgia, found that low blood levels of vitamin B12 were linked to a higher risk of hearing loss in a group of 55 healthy women aged 60 to 71. But this has yet to be confirmed by other studies.

Antioxidant Hearing Aids? Animal research recently found that a combo of antioxidants (vitamins A, C and E plus magnesium) significantly lessened noise-induced hearing loss. And research with Israeli soldiers found that magnesium provided small, but significant protection from temporary hearing loss due to noise.

EN's Bottom Line. It's too early to recommend specific supplements to defend against hearing loss. But taking a daily multi and eating nutrient-rich foods is a good idea to ensure an adequate intake of folic acid, B12 and antioxidants.

Hormone Use in Cows Raises Eyebrows, But Concerns Are Complex

Q. I’ve been seeing ads for milk without artificial hormones. Should I buy it?

A. We think so, but not for the reasons you might suspect. First, you should know there’s no such thing as hormone-free milk, and the Food and Drug Administration has issued warnings to milk manufacturers that claim that on labels.

Natural vs Synthetic. That’s because all milk—even organic milk—contains minuscule amounts of bovine somatotropin (BST), also known as bovine growth hormone (BGH), produced naturally by the pituitary glands of cows. It’s the use of a synthetic hormone called rBST that’s been the bone of contention between dairy farmers and consumer groups for more than a decade now.

Is rBST Safe? Recombinant BST (rBST) or recombinant BGH (rBGH) is a bioengineered version of natural BST. The FDA approved it in 1993 for use in dairy cows to boost milk production by about 10%. Many of the industrialized nations around the globe including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and all of the nations in the European Union do not allow the use of rBGH because of human and animal health concerns. The Codex Alimentarius, the UN’s main food safety body, concluded there is no consensus that rBGH is safe for human consumption. The U.S. FDA considers milk from cows that are given rBST to be safe to drink. A National Institutes of Health panel also reviewed the data and pronounced the use of rBST safe, because rBST is a “species-specific hormone” that has no activity in humans. Moreover, unlike steroid hormones (like estrogens), which are active when taken by mouth, protein hormones (like insulin and rBST) are broken down in the stomach into their component amino acids, just like any other protein.

Labels to Look for. Acceptable labels for milk produced without the use of rBST may read: “from cows not treated by rBST” accompanied by “no significant difference has been shown between milk derived from rBST-treated and non-rBST-treated cows.” The use of rBST is not an issue with certified organic milk, because the criteria state that organic milk cannot come from cows treated with rBST.

Grapefruit and Cancer?

Q. I read that eating grapefruit can cause breast cancer. Is that really true?

A. Not exactly, but there may be a risk. A recent study of more than 50,000 women found that women who ate grapefruit the most often (equal to half a grapefruit every other day) had a significantly increased risk of breast cancer.

The same natural compound in grapefruit that alters blood levels of some drugs is known to increase estrogen levels as well. And high estrogen levels increase the risk of breast cancer.

In fact, estrogen replacement therapy (ERT) must carry a warning that grapefruit increases estrogen levels. In this study, grapefruit increased breast cancer risk whether women took ERT or not.

EN's Bottom Line. This gives us pause. More research is needed before we can make recommendations to avoid grapefruit to reduce breast cancer risk, but if you are concerned you can opt for another citrus fruit, like oranges, instead.

The Real Deal. Concerns over the use of rBST have to do with animal welfare. rBST has been linked with increased foot problems, mastitis, and injection site reactions in dairy cows. Mastitis, an infection of the mammary glands, may require treatment with antibiotics. The rise in antibiotic use is of concern because it results in new strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

EN's Bottom Line. There’s a growing trend to sell or serve only dairy products from untreated cows. While there may be insufficient proof of immediate safety concerns, EN still advises choosing milk from cows not treated with rBST. Potential problems from antibiotic overuse and possible ill effects on cows’ health are reason enough.

Write to us if you have a question. We'll answer those of most interest to our readers. We regret, however, that we cannot personally respond. Send to: Environmental Nutrition P.O. Box 5656 Norwalk, CT 06856-5656 Phone: 800-424-7887 Fax: 203-857-3103 e-mail: customer_service@belvoir.com www.environmentalnutrition.com (click on “Contact Us”)
Copyright of Environmental Nutrition is the property of Belvoir Media Group and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.