In the NEWS

Herbal Extract Fights Recurrent Urinary Tract Infections

A widely available herbal extract known as *forskolin* may help reduce painful bladder infections and enhance the efficacy of anti-biotic treatment, according to Duke University scientists.\(^1\,\(^2\)

Bladder infections (90% of which are caused by *E. coli* bacteria) are common in women and often recur despite antibiotic treatment. While antibiotics typically kill most bacteria in the bladder, a small number may survive by hiding in cells lining the bladder, where antibiotics cannot reach them. After antibiotic treatment, these bacteria may re-emerge and begin multiplying again, leading to another bladder infection.

In mice, administering forskolin via injection or intravenously flushed out hidden *E. coli* bacteria into the urine, where they would be susceptible to antibiotic treatment. “This type of treatment strategy may prove to be beneficial for patients with recurrent urinary tract infections,” the Duke researchers concluded.

—Dayna Dye


Fatty Acid Balance Influences Depression Risk

Improving Americans’ dietary ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids could decrease their risk of depression and inflammatory diseases, according to a new report.\(^*\)

Americans consume about 20 times more omega-6 fatty acids than omega-3 fatty acids, far in excess of an optimal ratio of 4:1 or even 2:1. Omega-6 fatty acids are found in eggs, poultry, and grains, while omega-3s are supplied by cold-water fish, flaxseed, and walnuts.

The blood of 43 middle-aged to elderly men and women was analyzed for interleukin-6 (IL-6) and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-alpha), two cytokines that enhance inflammation. Those who consumed the most omega-6 fatty acids and reported more symptoms of depression had much higher levels of IL-6 and TNF-alpha.

The scientists suggested that low intake of omega-3s are associated with chronic inflammation.

—Dayna Dye


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High Lignan Intake May Lower Breast Cancer Risk

Women who consume high levels of lignans may have a reduced risk of breast cancer, according to a recent report.\(^*\) Found in foods such as flaxseed, legumes, seeds, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, plant lignans are a type of phytoestrogen.

In a study of 58,049 postmenopausal women in France, scientists analyzed the subjects’ intake of lignans. Those whose intake was in the top 25% of participants had a 17% lower risk of developing breast cancer than those whose intake was in the lowest quartile. The protective effect was limited to cancers that were estrogen- or progesterone-receptor-positive.

According to the study authors, “In view of the epidemiologic results of this study, the recommendation that women should consume diets that consist largely of fruits, vegetables, and cereals—all foods rich in lignans—should continue.”

—Dayna Dye
