New Study Suggests Natural Cocoa Compounds May Have Pronounced Vascular Benefits for Older Population

Flavanol-rich cocoa could offer powerful cardiovascular benefits for the nearly 78 million baby boomers in the United States today, suggests a new study published in the August issue of the Journal of Hypertension.

Researchers at Harvard Medical School and the Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston found that drinking a standardized flavanol-rich cocoa beverage improved several measures of blood vessel function, especially among older study participants. Flavanols are the natural compounds in cocoa that are increasingly being linked to promising circulatory benefits—including improved blood flow and a reduced tendency to form damaging clots.

In the current study, 15 healthy young adults under age 50, and 19 healthy adults over age 50 drank the specially-made flavanol-rich cocoa beverage daily for four to six days. The researchers tracked changes in the function of their peripheral arteries using several measures, including peripheral arterial tonometry a standard method for evaluating the health of an individual’s blood vessels. At the study’s completion, significant improvements in vessel function following the consumption of flavanol-rich cocoa were seen in both young and older adults. While aging has previously been shown to lead to a deterioration of blood vessel function, this study is the first to demonstrate that the consumption of flavanol-rich cocoa can improve this age-related loss of vessel function in older adults. In agreement with previous studies using this same cocoa, these improvements in both young and older adults appear to be linked to the ability of cocoa flavanols to influence the body’s production of nitric oxide, a key regulator of blood vessel tone.

Compared to the younger subjects, the vessel responses of the older men and women were significantly more pronounced after drinking the flavanol-rich cocoa beverage—suggesting that the consumption of this flavanol-rich cocoa offers a dietary approach for maintaining endothelial vessel function, and indicates the possibility that this cocoa could be useful for improving endothelial function in our aging population.

“Eating is typically associated with deterioration in vessel health, specifically related to function of the critical inner lining, or endothelium,” said co-author Naomi Fisher, M.D., Assistant Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School. “Our findings demonstrate that consumption of this flavanol-rich cocoa can improve the function of blood vessels in a healthy elderly population. More research is needed to see if older adults with cardiovascular disease can also experience these improvements following consumption of this cocoa, but these initial findings certainly offer great promise. These findings have great potential to impact the health of our aging population.”

Partially supported by a grant from Mars, Incorporated, this new research builds on a growing body of evidence demonstrating the potential of cocoa flavanols to improve blood flow, and perhaps in turn impact long-term cardiovascular health.

Hypertension experts Claudio Ferri, Davide Grassi and Guido Grassi underscored the importance of these research findings, suggesting that the “introduction of cocoa could result in cardiovascular prevention,” yet cautioned that not all chocolate offers the benefit of cocoa flavanols.

For more information visit www.cocoapro.com.

Women’s Health Study Suggests Shift to Alternative Menopausal Treatments

Menopause is a different experience for every woman. One woman may have virtually no symptoms, while another has debilitating hot flashes, night sweats, sleeplessness and mood swings. Since menopause means different things for different women, shouldn’t treatments be catered according to each woman’s experience?

Eight leading international women’s health experts thought so. A team of experts, led by Dr. Lila Nachtigall, M.D., professor of obstetrics and gynecology at New York University’s School of Medicine, recently wrote a study in the April 2006 issue of the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology Canada (JOGC), Canada’s peer-reviewed journal of obstetrics, gynecology and women’s health in it they describe the need for a treatment algorithm that enables practitioners to customize menopause treatment regimens according to their patients’ symptom severity.

The Algorithm Revealed

The authors’ conclusions suggest a growing trend away from prescription hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in women with mild to moderate symptoms and an increasing trend toward lifestyle modification and the use of complementary and alternative medicines.

The group recommends over-the-counter dietary supplements among the first lines of defense in the treatment of the mild and moderate symptoms of menopause. This represents the first time scientists have come to a consensus suggesting dietary supplements as treatment for the symptoms of menopause.

Isoflavones derived from the red clover plant, which are marketed under the brand name Promensil, were identified as one of the acceptable dietary supplements due to its efficacy and safety in treating hot flashes and other symptoms of menopause as demonstrated in numerous clinical trials.

In constructing the algorithm, the team of experts conducted a literature review and considered findings from recently published menopause treatment guidelines from around the globe. In addition, the group evaluated the results of system-