Comment: For breast cancer survivors, this data provide little evidence of benefit from using black cohosh to control hot flashes, although a reduction in sweating may be important to some individuals. Previous non-controlled observational studies have demonstrated that black cohosh completely ameliorates hot flashes in 50% of women and another 30-35% receive some degree of relief. Other nutritional/herbal treatments for breast cancer patients suffering from hot flashes include bioflavonoids with vitamin C, vitamin E, red clover, acupuncture, herbal combination products — wild yam, dong quai, burdock root, motherwort, licorice root, chaste tree. Conventional options include megestrol acetate, venlafaxine and clomipramine.


Propolis Ointment for Genital Herpes

Forty-six men and forty-four women aged 18-69 with recurrent genital herpes simplex virus type 2, participated in a single-blind, randomized controlled multi-center trial. Patients were treated during an active outbreak with either a 3% propolis ointment, 5% acyclovir ointment, or placebo ointment four times daily for 10 days. Patients were examined on day 1, day 3, day 7 and day 10 of treatment. Lesions were noted for location, number, size and stage. They were classified as vesicular, ulcerated, crusted or healed. Laboratory and clinical examinations were conducted.

Both groups were considered equal for the stage of the lesion at initial examination and the nature of the symptoms. On day 3 of the treatment, 50% on propolis ointment, 27% on acyclovir and 0% taking placebo had crusted lesions. On day 7, and of the patients who had ulcerations, 10 taking propolis, 4 taking acyclovir and 3 taking placebo were healed. On day 10 of the treatment, and of the patients who initially had ulcerations, 100% were healed in the propolis group, 80% in the acyclovir group and 70% in the placebo group were healed. In the group with initial vesicular lesions, more patients had healed completely in the propolis group (50%) than in the acyclovir group (13%) and placebo group (25%) together. When the overall treatment was completed after 10 days, 24/30 patients had healed in the propolis group, 14/30 in the acyclovir group and 12/30 in the placebo group. No adverse effects related to the medication were noted in any of the groups at any of the examinations.

Comment: Genital herpes is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the developed world. Of women visiting gynecological clinics, 2-6% exhibit genital herpetic infections. Recurrent genital herpes infections can be difficult to treat. Topical treatments used acutely and systemic treatments used in the interim as well as acutely, are an excellent combined approach. Topical acyclovir, topical lemon balm and topical lysine have been used with some success. We now have another not only viable option, but perhaps preferable. Propolis is rich in flavonoids that have demonstrable anti-viral properties in vitro. Propolis exhibits its antimicrobial effects by inhibiting cell division, disorganizing the cytoplasmic membrane in the cell wall and inhibiting protein synthesis. The exact mechanism beyond these issues is not fully understood.


Smoking During Pregnancy and Infant Colic

Maternal smoking during pregnancy has been found to increase the risk of colic in infants, which can then make the baby cranky. Among infants whose mothers smoke 15 or more cigarettes daily during their pregnancy, the risk of infant colic can be increased twofold.

Women’s Health Update

This recent Danish study evaluated 1,820 pregnant women and followed them as well as their children during the pregnancy and the first 8 months postpartum. Approximately 11% of the infants had colic. With self-administered questionnaires at week 16 and week 30 of pregnancy, smoking behaviors were categorized. A high risk classification was given if the mother smoked during and after pregnancy or only during pregnancy. A low risk classification was designated if they stopped smoking during pregnancy but resumed after delivery.

The risk of having a child with colic doubled in women who smoked 15 or more cigarettes per day during pregnancy or postpartum, compared with nonsmokers. Smoking both during pregnancy and after delivery regardless of how many cigarettes were smoked, increased the risk of colic and smoking only in the postpartum period increased the risk just slightly.

Comment: How many more reasons does a person need to not smoke, stop smoking, and stop smoking again if they fail? Just bringing up a brief 1-3 minute conversation about not smoking with our patients has an immediate impact on the numbers of people who stop. We need to continue to find ways to prevent people from starting to smoke, and encouraging them with effective stop smoking strategies.


Physical Activity and Coronary Heart Disease

This study was undertaken to evaluate the association of intensity or length of activity to coronary heart disease. The study population included 39,372 women aged 45 or older. The women were enrolled between 1992 and 1995 with a follow-up period until 1999. There were 244 cases of coronary heart disease during this time period. Vigorous exercise activities were associated with the lowest relative risk of coronary heart disease (RR= 0.63). Walking was also able to predict a lower risk in women who had no history of a vigorous exercise program or activity. Walking for up to 1 hour a week compared with no walking had a RR of 0.86. The RR for 1-1.5 hours and 2 or more hours were 0.49 and 0.48, respectively. They also analyzed the pace of the walk which ranged from 2.3- mph. They concluded that the length of time spent walking was the most important factor in reducing the risk, not the pace and that light to moderate exercise from walking is associated with a positive health benefit.

Comment: It is well accepted that exercise reduces the risk and occurrence of coronary heart disease. What is not absolutely certain is what is the appropriate level of exercise. Most exercise advice recommends a minimum of 20 minutes of exercise with a 5 minute warm up and 5 minute cool down phase 4 to 5 times per week. Although this study did not specify whether the exercise could be done in multiple blocks of time or all at once, most individuals could find 1 hour per week to walk, and at a reasonable pace of 2-3 mph. I find this study encouraging news for my patients who have a great deal of difficulty creating a lifestyle that includes regular exercise.