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Relieving Dry Mouth. Combating inadequate or thick saliva, often due to medications or cancer treatment.

Cholesterol-Lowering Grain. Barley is just as good—just not as famous—a cholesterol buster as oats.

Just In

Frying Oil Linked to High Blood Pressure

Reusing frying oil increases the risk of high blood pressure, according to a recent study from Malaga, Spain. But chalk up another benefit of olive oil, which did best in the study.

The researchers randomly sampled and analyzed cooking oil from 538 homes. They analyzed it for nonvolatile breakdown compounds that are formed during frying and are absorbed by the food and thus consumed. They compared the amount of breakdown products in the oils to several health indices of the adults in those homes.

The results showed a direct link between the intake of these breakdown products and high blood pressure. The risk was greatest in those families who used sunflower oil and least in those who cooked with olive oil, which tends to be more stable when heated, say the researchers. The monounsaturated fats in olive oil are also credited with beneficial effects on blood pressure.

Vitamin A: New Research Finds Bones Benefit From Less Retinol

Part 1 of a six-part series on key vitamins.

Vitamin A hasn’t been in the forefront of nutrition concerns in recent years. Vitamins C and E and folic acid have garnered more attention. But vitamin A is back in the news, and it’s not all good.

Vitamin A is essential for keeping your eyesight keen, your skin silky smooth and your immune system in top working order. But scientists have long known that too much A can accumulate in the liver, causing problems.

Only recently have researchers uncovered a link between excessive vitamin A—specifically retinol—and weak bones.

This potential peril to bone health may even spur a wholesale change in what’s in your multivitamin. \( \text{Ent} \) takes a fresh look at the latest facts.

How Real the Risk of Too Little? A frank deficiency of vitamin A—and the resulting night blindness—is rare in the U.S., thanks to fortification of such foods as milk and margarine. But even today, people who eat very limited diets and don’t take a daily multivitamin are vulnerable, if only for a borderline deficiency.

And because vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin, anyone with a condi-

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Don’t Take Your Drinking Water For Granted, Experts Caution

Every day more than 240 million Americans turn on their taps to drink, bathe and cook. For healthy adults, the water that comes out of the faucets is generally safe, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t take steps to make it even safer. All it takes to sicken hundreds of thousands of people is a single outbreak, like the 1993 Cryptosporidium incident in Milwaukee.

For the very young, the very old, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems from cancer treatment or AIDS, drinking contaminated water can be especially dangerous. What are your chances of falling ill from simply turning on the faucet?

Safe, But Safe Enough? “Most municipal water is modestly acceptable and poses no serious health risk to the general public,” says Erik Olson, Senior Attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in Washington, D.C., “but we could do better.” Doing better, according to the NRDC, means looking at contaminants that the Envi-

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In a 30-year Swedish study published last year, researchers found that men with the highest blood levels of retinol had seven times the number of fractures as those with the lowest levels. This backs up earlier findings from Harvard's Nurses' Health Study in which women who reported the highest intakes of vitamin A (at least 6,600 International Units a day for 18 years) had nearly double the risk of hip fractures as those with the lowest intakes (less than 1,650 IU). Studies have found no similar adverse effect from carotenoids; plant sources provide A with no worry of excess. However, not everyone is convinced of the latest retinol research.

John Hathcock, Ph.D., of the Council for Responsible Nutrition, which represents supplement manufacturers, cites other data with conflicting results. One study, based on nutrient intakes from the most recent government nutrition survey, found no link between a high vitamin A intake and bone density problems. Diane Feskanich, D.Sc., the Nurses' Health Study lead researcher, argues, "Most studies have shown an association between vitamin A intake and [poor] bone density."

Lower Levels Likely? Intakes as low as 4,500 to 5,000 IU of vitamin A in the Harvard study were linked to increased incidence of bone fractures.

The latest recommended intakes for vitamin A are 2,333 IU for women and 3,000 IU for men. However, the Daily Value (DV) for vitamin A—5,000 IU—listed on food and supplement labels is based on an older set of requirements. When you see 100% DV, you're getting this higher, potentially dangerous amount. Experts suggest you not take in more than 3,000 IU of retinol in a multi (60% of the DV). The rest can be as beta-carotene.

The so-called "safe" upper limit is currently set at 10,000 IU per day. Feskanich favors lowering it, though she says the risk to health is only from chronically excessive doses.

A-Plus for Beta-Carotene, Not Retinol. The retinol form of vitamin A is found naturally in animal foods, as well as in fortified foods like breakfast cereals, nonfat and low-fat milk and margarines. (Some margarines have replaced a portion of their retinol with beta-carotene.)

But vitamin supplements are the easiest way to get too much retinol. (It is difficult to overdose on A from food unless you use cod liver oil regularly or eat a lot of liver.) In response to the recent research, manufacturers have begun to reduce the amount of retinol in supplements. For example, Centrum now contains 3,500 IU, with 29% of that as beta-carotene. Choose a product that discloses the percentage of A that's from beta-carotene.

The only danger from an over-abundance of beta-carotene is in food is that your skin may become orange-tinted, which is both harmless and reversible.

EN'S Bottom Line. Be sure to get enough A, but not too much. Stick to food sources of carotenoids (see sidebar). And take a multi that ideally provides no more than 60% of the DV as retinol. Other tips:

EN'S A-List Advice
- Continue taking a "multi." Check the label for dose and source of vitamin A. Aim for no more than 3,000 IU from retinol.
- Don't take separate supplements of vitamin A or beta-carotene.
- Eat plenty of produce, particularly dark leafy greens or bright orange fruits and vegetables.
- Limit liver to once a month.

—Linda Antinoro, J.D., R.D.
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