

Smart Food Choices Newsletter

Spring 2005

Prevention: good oil on living longer

Extra virgin olive oil has long been regarded as an essential part of the Mediterranean diet for healthy living. Now scientists believe they have discovered exactly what makes it so good for us. A US study suggests the oil can prevent inflammation in the same way as common headache pills. In doing so, it helps stave off long-term health problems such as cancer and heart disease. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found the main compound in the oil, oleocanthal, contained the same properties as the painkiller ibuprofen. Ibuprofen has been linked to a lower risk of cancer and heart problems, as has aspirin, which belongs to the same class of anti-inflammatory drugs, called COX inhibitors.

The study concluded that extra virgin olive oil - made from the first pressing of the olive - may offer similar long-term advantages. Paul Breslin, who led the research, said extra virgin could not actually cure headaches because a daily dose of 50g would only be equivalent to 10 per cent of a normal dose of ibuprofen. But he said a long-term Mediterranean diet containing oil could help build natural defences to cancer and heart problems.

The study, published in the journal *Nature*, adds to growing evidence of the health benefits of a Mediterranean diet typically rich in fish, unsaturated fats and vegetables.

Sunday Times (Perth), 4/9/05, p24

Nutrition: health benefit in mushrooms

Mushrooms have one of the strongest antioxidant effects of all foods because of a powerful substance found in fungi, according to US researchers. Scientists from the Pennsylvania State University say their tests show mushrooms contain the highest amount of ergothioneine, a natural antioxidant thought by some researchers to help prevent heart disease and cancer.

The Cancer Council of WA said there was no evidence that mushrooms specifically prevented cancer but the general benefits of eating a variety of fruit and vegetables were well known.

Nutrition and physical activity coordinator Steve Pratt said the findings that mushrooms were rich in antioxidants did not necessarily mean they prevented cancer.

West Australian, 2/9/05, p3

Risk: dairy link to cancer

A meta-analysis of epidemiological studies suggests milk and lactose intake may increase the risk of ovarian cancer. The study found people with the highest level of intake had a 27% increase in risk compared to those with lowest intake.

Of the studies analysed, 18 case-control studies showed no association except for whole milk, while three prospective cohort studies found significant positive associations (*International Journal of Cancer* 2005; online).

Australian Doctor, 26/8/05, p11

Risk: indulging ourselves sick (Qld)

For the past 1000 years, the average life expectancy of humans has steadily increased. The 20th century saw huge leaps in medical technology with a corresponding leap in life expectancies. Yet increasing research seems to suggest a decline in life expectancy as our lifestyles negate advances from innovation and technology. Bluntly, we are eating, smoking and drinking ourselves towards an early grave.

Significant volumes of recent medical research have made direct correlations between our lifestyles excesses and medical conditions such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease, just to name a few.

In its interim report, Queensland Health Systems Review said the state had Australia's worst death rates due to heart disease, stroke, skin cancer, suicide and behaviours such as smoking and high-risk drinking in males, and overweight and obesity for all people.

Courier Mail, 25/8, p13

Prevention: folate fad has dangers: expert (WA)

A WA-led push for compulsory folate in flour had a setback when a nutritional expert claimed it could cause dangerous side-effects. Dr Mark Lawrence, senior lecturer at Deakin University's school of exercise and nutrition sciences, said folate reduced the risk of babies being born with defects such as spina bifida but it's long-term effects, particularly in children were unknown. Overseas studies suggested high levels of folate in the body could interfere with the absorption of some drugs, mask a vitamin deficiency possibly leading to irreversible brain damage and increase the chances of women conceiving twins.

Folate prevents up to 70 per cent of neural tube defects and is linked to the prevention of heart disease and dementia, and reduces the risk of childhood cancer acute lymphoblastic lymphoma. It is added to some breads and breakfast cereals but Food Standards Australia and New Zealand is investigating a proposal from State health ministers to compel manufacturers to put it in staple foods such as bread.

West Australian, 24/8, p3

Vitamin D Deficiency in children: in winter children need to play in the sun

The school-ground policy of 'no hat, no sunscreen, no play' may be causing children in southern states more harm than good during the winter months, a study warns. This is because children are being denied the sun exposure they need to ensure adequate bone density, said Professor Graeme Jones, the study's lead author and head of the musculoskeletal unit at the Menzies Research Institute in Hobart.

Professor Jones' comments came after his study of 136 healthy adolescent Tasmanian boys found that two-thirds were vitamin D deficient, and that vitamin D stores were determined primarily by the amount of sports-related sun exposure the boys experienced.

"Modified sun protection guidelines state that you need a certain amount of sun for health... and the Cancer Council have recommended that once the UV index falls below a certain amount... you don't need to practise sun protection," Professor Jones said.

Medical Observer, 1/7/05, p19

Nutrition: health benefits of organic food are clear

The big question is whether organic food is better for you than food produced in the agrichemical-based conventional system. Yes it is, says Shane Heaton, and he has impressive credentials to back up his assessment. The Brisbane-based nutritionist, author and organic researcher has earned an international reputation for his work, particularly his ground-breaking book *Organic Farming, Food Quality and Human Health*, the result of two years of researching scientific papers in the vaults of the British Library.

"This careful and thorough review of the science comparing organic and non-organic foods revealed that, collectively, the available evidence supports the consumer belief that organic food is safer, more nutritious and better for you than non-organic food," he says.

Pesticide residues, for example, are found in far higher concentrations in non-organic food than in organic. Heaton collated research that found links between such residues and rising incidence of many cancers, Parkinson's disease and alarming drops in fertility.

"Pesticides mimic the hormone oestrogen, potentially disrupting the fine hormonal balance in our bodies, and may be why incidence of hormone-related cancers such as breast, prostate, ovarian and testicular cancers are on the increase."

Courier Mail, 17/5/05, Good Life section, p10

Nutrition: low-fat diet cuts breast cancer relapses

Washington: Breast cancer victims can reduce the chances of tumours recurring by adopting low-fat diets, according to the first study to produce evidence that a lifestyle change can fend off any type of tumour.

The study of more than 2400 middle-aged and elderly women found those who reduced fat in their diets after undergoing standard treatment for early breast cancer were significantly less likely to suffer a recurrence in the next five years. The findings indicate low-fat diets, which are

also being tested to protect women against getting breast cancer in the first place, could become a standard weapon for fighting the disease.

Age, 18/5/05, International News, p14

Nutrition: spilling the beans on side effects of soy

Once hailed as the great cure-all, the humble soy bean is now the subject of questions about whether it produces negative side effects. There have been reports suggesting that soy products containing plant oestrogens can cause gastric distress, cancer and an enlarged thyroid.

But Dr Phillipa Lyons-Wall, a lecturer in nutrition and dietetics at the Queensland University of Technology, said there had been much research done in the field of soy and the strongest evidence was that it could reduce the risk of heart disease and, if part of a balanced diet, was unlikely to have any had side effects.

Sun Herald, 20/33/05, p27

Nutrition: green light for red sauce

The humble barbecue favourite, tomato sauce, is good for you - especially if it is organic, say researchers. They have offered scientific evidence that organic good can be healthier than non-organic alternatives.

Scientists at the Californian Agricultural Research Service tested 13 types of tomato sauce for health-protective antioxidants. Organic tomato sauce was found to have up to three times the amount of lycopene, the pigment that gives tomatoes their red colour and is an important antioxidant. Previous research had shown that lycopenes offered some important health benefits, including a protective effect against breast, pancreatic and bowel cancers.

The benefits to the environment from organic farming are well known. However, hard data supporting significantly increased levels of beneficial nutrients has been difficult to establish. The organic tomato research offers some of the most compelling evidence to date.

Clearly, more research is needed into the possible health benefits of organic foods, but this weekend, perhaps dollop a little extra tomato sauce on your chops and sausages, especially if its organic.

Sunday Times (Perth), 20/3/05, p51

Research: cancer offers clue to immortality

Scientists believe they may be able to increase people's lifespans significantly by learning why cancer cells are immortal. Brian Morris, a professor of molecular medical sciences at the University of Sydney, said cultures of cancer cells in laboratories across the world had been kept alive for decades.

Professor Morris said a molecule in cancer cells called telomerase which prevented the degradation of telomeres - or protective caps at the end of chromosomes - was believed to be responsible for keeping the cells alive.

"Some people suggest that by over-expressing telomerase in all cells in the body, maybe we could make humans ... immortal," he said. "If it can be applied in a totally regulated, controlled manner to all cells of the body, we could massively extend the human lifespan."

West Australian, 19/3/05, p64; Adelaide Advertiser, 19/3, p45; Courier Mail, 19/3, p2

Research: hops block cancer toxin

A substance in hops, a plant used in brewing beer, has been found to neutralise a bacterial toxin believed to cause stomach cancer, researchers said.

The researchers from Japan's Chiba University and Asahi Breweries will report their findings on hop polyphenol at a meeting of the Japanese Society for Bacteriology in Tokyo in April, they said. Infections involving the helicobacter pylori bacterium cause most stomach ulcers, which studies suggest can lead to cancer. It is expected the substance will contribute to developing medicines for digestive diseases.

Daily Telegraph, 19/3/05, p15

Risk: food chemical concern to stay on backburner

Australia's food watchdog will continue to monitor cancer concerns about acrylamide, a chemical formed in baked or fried foods such as potato chips and bread products. Food Standards Australia New Zealand said this week that although there was no direct evidence that the chemical caused cancer in humans, an international review had found it could pose a health risk. The review was by the World Health Organisation and several food authorities, including FSANZ. In a statement, FSANZ said it would maintain a watching brief on the issue and talk to the Australian food industry about changing manufacturing practices to reduce the chemical forming in foods.

West Australian, 19/3/05, p52

Nutrition: working in the fruit lane

An office-based fruit-buying club is proving effective in stopping workers from breaking down mid-morning and having a high-sugar, high-fat chocolate or muffin snack on top of their breakfast. Cancer Council of WA staff have adopted a Danish program which involves everyone putting in \$3 a week to have fresh fruit and vegetables constantly on hand.

The result has been up to 300 pieces of fruit consumed each week. Nutrition and physical activity coordinator Steve Pratt said the \$3 fee at the Cancer Council was a payroll deduction. Each week, a committee of three ensured the 20 staff members were supplied with two to three pieces of fruit a day, the recommended daily intake.

West Australian, 6/4/05, Health section, p6

Prevention: battle of the beverage

Curtin University researchers have revealed that antioxidant-rich green tea can prevent ovarian and prostate cancer and also help women with ovarian cancer survive longer. Their scientifically sound studies showed those women with ovarian cancer who drank the tea regularly - at least one cup a day - reduced the risk of dying of ovarian cancer by 60 per cent.

Their startling findings have been published in prestigious international cancer journals and point to the ability of green tea to stop cancer cells in their tracks. Regular consumption slows the growth of human cancer cells because the tea's potent antioxidants cause the cell cycle to stop.

When it comes to coffee, Cancer Council of WA's director of education and research Terry Slevin said in the past a lot of the research had looked at concerns that coffee might increase the risk of cancer. "We've had the good news that this is not the case. It is, therefore, only natural that there is now an alternative body of research looking at whether coffee can help prevent cancer."

West Australian, 6/4/05, Health section, p3

Nutrition: favours in the flesh

It's bad news for cows, but there are very good reasons to eat meat. It's an easy way to get enough iron, zinc and B vitamins and, providing it's lean, meat can help you lose weight. On the flip-side, meat can also be high in saturated fat and can stunt your food choices.

There's the on-again-off-again link to bowel cancer. Recent research in the United States found people who ate the most meat, especially processed meat, had the highest risk of bowel cancer - the latest in a series of studies claiming meat is - or isn't - a factor in Australia's most common internal cancer.

The perennial problem with the meat and cancer story is that there's no absolute proof that meat contributes to cancer, says Associate Professor Dallas English, an epidemiologist at the Cancer Council Victoria, where earlier research has found that eating red meat or pork, or both, more than 10 times a week increased bowel cancer risk.

His interpretation of the many studies of meat and cancer is that there's a small increased risk of bowel cancer with frequent meat consumption, but no good evidence that it contributes to other cancers such as breast cancer.

The Cancer Council NSW backs the Commonwealth Government's *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*, which recommends three to four 65-100 gram servings of cooked red meat a week, while the American Cancer Society suggests limiting consumption of red meats, especially those high

in fat, and processed meat, and choosing fish, poultry or beans as alternatives to beef, pork and lamb.

Sydney Morning Herald, 7/4/05, Health & Science section, p7

Nutrition: how to eat your way to a longer life-span

Sticking to a "Mediterranean" diet can extend your life by a year, according to experts. A study suggests consuming plenty of fruit, vegetables, fish and olive oil, combined with the odd glass of wine and a low intake of meat and dairy products, could be the key to long life.

The research reveals that a healthy man of 60 who follows the diet could expect to live a year longer than one of the same age who eats differently.

The study adds to the wealth of evidence showing the benefits of a diet based on fruit, vegetables, "healthy" unsaturated fats and a modest alcohol intake, which is common in the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

Experts have previously linked the diet to a lower risk of death from heart disease and cancer, the biggest killer diseases in the developed world.

Sunday Mail (Brisbane), 10/4/05, p29

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