

The Alternative View



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- **The issue of statins and their side effects and a look at an effective alternative.**
- **Living North, having headaches and low vitamin D levels... there is a link!**
- **How beetroots can lower your blood pressure...**

Welcome to issue 6. There has been a lot of interesting stuff buzzing around the literature over the last few months but I have selected a few hot subjects for this issue which I hope you will find interesting. There is a lot of fuss surrounding the issue of cholesterol, heart disease and the knee jerk prescribing of statin style drugs to lower the cholesterol. Its a controversial area but the side effects that some experience from statins make it impossible to continue taking them... now there may be an alternative! I also take up the developments in the world of vitamin D; it looks like it may hold the answer for some chronic headache syndromes. Finally, I outline just how beetroots can lower your blood pressure. The humble beet hit the news when scientists discovered just how effective a dose of beets are on the blood pressure of normal test subjects, opening the potential for those with high blood pressure to benefit. MW

Cholesterol control without statins!

Cholesterol and heart disease have become synonymous; having a high cholesterol being associated with a high risk of heart disease. While arguments rage on regarding this cause and effect relationship what is known is that heart disease is a multi-factorial issue. In other words, a mixture of age, sex (being male or female that is!), being a smoker, having high blood pressure, being diabetic, not exercising much along with having an elevated cholesterol are all in the mixing bowl when it comes to heart disease. Cook this over a gentle heat of an ill-determined collection of individual genetic traits and the growing knowledge of environment and emotional stress influences and it becomes very evident that just altering the cholesterol level may be easily measurable and important but it is by far just one modifiable risk factor. Despite this, the cholesterol business is booming. Special spreads to help lower cholesterol are appearing and retired cricketers are spouting the heart protective virtues of wholegrain breakfast cereals... Alongside this onslaught we now have a range of powerful drugs that floor cholesterol levels within a very short space of time; the infamous 'statins'.

I find it interesting that back in 2000 the *Journal of the American Heart Association* stated that "*Statins are well tolerated and have an excellent safety record*", and by 2010 the UK medical journal *Heart* was commenting that "*...studies have found that patients starting statins are at increased risk of adverse effects, including liver dysfunction, myopathy, acute renal failure and cataracts.*"

Today, statins are one of the most common prescribed drug which prompted a large scale investigation of the available information by a team from Cambridge University, followed by their publication in the highly respected journal *Archives of Internal Medicine*. After the careful analysis of 11 key clinical trials involving 65,229 participants their conclusions rocked the statin world; "*...analysis did not find evidence for the benefit of statin therapy.*" So..., confusion all round!

If we look at heart disease as an end point then it's not surprising that simply shifting one factor is not the answer. Statin therapy or other cholesterol lowering approaches may be important in individuals at high risk, such as those with diabetes or previous heart attacks, but slapping all those with a low risk or simply a mild elevation in total cholesterol may need some rethinking when all the potential

list of side effects are taken into account. With their tendency to cause side effects another problem arises when lowering cholesterol is needed but the user simply can't tolerate any of the statins prescribed. Reliable estimates show that as many as 40% of those who receive a prescription for a statin are thought to take it for less than 1 year. Possible reasons include the adverse effects, poor explanations of their benefits by their doctor, and patients' reluctance to take prescription or long-term medications. This may help explain the growth in the use of Red Yeast Rice (RYR) powder as a food supplement which, in the USA, rose by 80% from 2005 to 2008. RYR has been shown to reduce cholesterol levels and in a recent study demonstrated the ability to reduce cholesterol levels in those previously affected by statin related side effects, such as muscular pains, to the point where they had to stop statin therapy! RYR powder in capsules may be the way forward for those needing to trim their levels. Often just 2 capsules (1200mg) daily is all that's needed! TAV

Seasonal headaches mirror vitamin D fluctuations & geographical location.

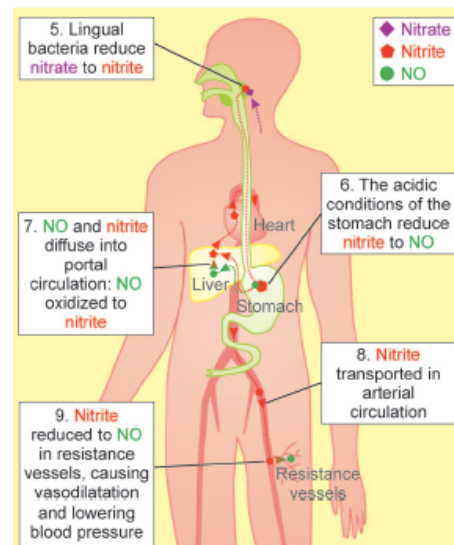
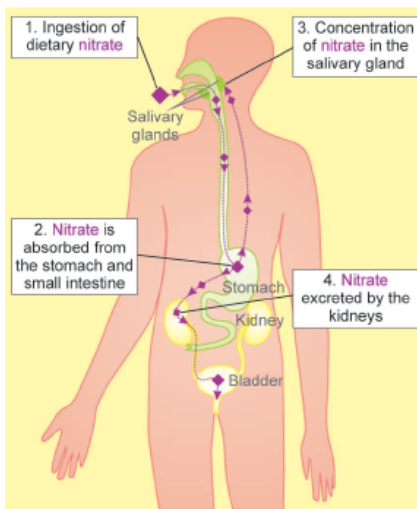
An article published this May caught my attention. It made some interesting links between vitamin D, headaches and seasonal changes. Personally, I always like to see patterns in relationship to health problems. Every biological event in nature follows some kind of pattern ranging from the light-dark cycle to migration patterns through to our own internal biological circadian clock that keep us going. Anyway, this study highlighted the growing acceptance that our vitamin D levels are on the low side these days. A low level of vitamin D appears to be linked with a growing number of health problems including the persistence of chronic pain in some people (*I briefly reviewed the effects of vitamin D3 in offsetting the H1N1 virus back in TAV issue 1*). There have been a few case studies published indicating how vitamin D has been helpful in treating chronic headache but this article takes it a stage further. The authors describe how vitamin D deficiency is strongly related to geographical latitude, which is also associated with an increased incidence of tension type headache and even migraine. What they also discovered revealed that there was an increased frequency of headache attacks in autumn-winter and least attacks in summertime. Where the pattern becomes interesting is in the fact that this profile of headaches matches the seasonal variations of vitamin D in the blood! Because parts of the brain and central nervous system contain specific vitamin D receptors (VDR) and vitamin D binding protein the role of vitamin D in the generation of headache becomes more and more intriguing. The exact functions of VDR's located in the brain and nervous system are not completely understood but according to the scientists involved with this study, their presence does suggest a link with chronic head pains. ^{TAV}

On a personal level I have used vitamin D3 with a number of patients with persistent and hitherto unresponsive chronic headache syndromes. The results have been interesting because before I was aware of the vitamin D and headache association these patients were taking the vitamin D for bone health issues and reported, quite unexpectedly, that their headaches had improved and in some cases gone! At the time I did not make the link... but now on reflection they were on vitamin D3 1000iu for a good month or so before they reported an improvement in headaches. With its low risk for toxicity and wide safety of dose range D3 may be worth a try in cases of persistent headache especially if you live north!

Beetroots lower blood pressure!

Back in TAV 3 I briefly reported on the effects of beetroot juice on energy when it was reported that drinking beetroot juice could boost the ability of the body to carry oxygen. Back then, this effect was attributed to the conversion of certain compounds found in Beetroot to nitrite, which in turn appeared to boost the blood's oxygen carrying ability. Well, it looks like its Beetroots year this year! Another study had discovered that a similar conversion to nitrite is at the heart of Beetroot's ability to lower blood pressure in normal test subjects

suggesting that those with elevated blood pressures could benefit as well. From the diagrams (obtained from the journal *Hypertension*) it can be seen that once eaten, the nitrate compounds naturally found in Beetroots are eventually converted into nitrite by bacteria and concentrated within the salivary glands. From there, the nitrite is eventually converted into nitric oxide (NO) within the cells of major arteries causing them to relax and open wider. Additional benefits of NO



are also experienced, such as a reduction in inflammation. Ongoing cardiovascular research indicates that inflammation lies at the centre of coronary artery disease and atherosclerosis making NO a very desirable substance to have floating around in your

arteries! Beetroots are naturally high in nitrate so they make for a good natural source for this complex reaction. If you don't like the juice or fuss of making it take 4-6 of our beetroot capsules in place. The study used 500ml of beetroot juice, in one go! While it's difficult to make a direct dose for dose comparison between juice and the pure dried beetroot concentrate in the capsules taking 4-6 capsules a day should deliver plenty of the key nitrate compounds and is a lot more convenient than turning your kitchen and juicer purple! ^{TAV}

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