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Late-breaking brief news items to life extensionists, as well as anyone interested in living a longer healthier life

In The News

Med- Notes

ginkgo Extends Life Span

Documented in animal and human studies, the pharmaceutical extract of ginkgo biloba has been shown to protect and improve cognitive performance. Now, it may have a new function. In France and Germany, ginkgo is one of the most frequently prescribed drugs because of its broad-spectrum effects against a host of degenerative diseases. An unexpected finding occurred in a study published in *Physiology & Behavior* (1998, Vol 63, No 3 pp-425-433). The study was designed to evaluate the neurological effects of ginkgo, and as expected, ginkgo improved learning and memory in a variety of tests to assess cognitive function. What surprised the scientists, however, was the rats administered ginkgo lived a mean of 31 months compared to 26.4 months in the placebo group. In human equivalency terms, these results indicate that ginkgo could extend life span by 11 years. The scientists who conducted this study went into quite a bit of detail to explain why ginkgo may have produced this unexpected longevity benefit, and suggested that life span studies on ginkgo extract be initiated to confirm these initial results.



Hepatitis C Epidemic Lurks About

Those who received blood transfusions prior to 1988 remain in the dark: the government continues to delay notifying 400,000 Americans who may have contracted hepatitis C from tainted blood transfusions between 1988 and 1992. In a recent report, critics argue the FDA should be reaching further back. Due to hepatitis C's debilitating effects, those infected need to be notified that they may need to take aggressive steps to prevent the virus from destroying their liver and causing primary liver cancer. The FDA replies that the blood banking industry needs more time to gear up for this massive project. The fact that the FDA is still protecting the economic interests of the blood banks at the expense of the health of the American consumer is not news. Reports dating back to the early 1980s show the FDA intentionally ignored the problem of viral contamination of the nation's blood supply. Thousands of Americans die every year from hepatitis and HIV viruses that were transmitted via blood transfusions.

Genistein and The Prostate Gland

Epidemiological reports suggest that Asians consuming a diet high in soy have low incidences of prostate cancer. In animal models, soy and genistein have been demonstrated to suppress the development of prostate cancer. A study appearing in the journal *Prostate* (1998, Vol 37, Iss 1, pp-36-43) investigated the mechanism of action, bioavailability and toxicity of genistein in the rodent model. The scientists found that genistein was readily absorbed into the bloodstream and protected against the development of prostate cancer by three specific mechanisms, with no apparent toxicity to the animals. The concentration of genistein needed to inhibit these cancer-inducing mechanisms was achieved with amounts that could be obtained by eating lots of soy products, or taking genistein supplements. The scientists concluded that genistein may be useful in both protecting against and treating prostate cancer, primarily by inhibiting a signaling pathway that cancer cells need to proliferate out of control.

New Mechanism of Saw Palmetto Found and Revealed

Saw palmetto remains under the microscope. Italian researchers have discovered that the standard dose of saw palmetto reduces the levels of dihydrotestosterone (DHT) and epidermal growth factor (EGF) by two thirds in the periurethral region of the prostate gland. It is the periurethral area of the prostate whose enlargement restricts urine flow. These scientists also found that saw palmetto reduces DHT and EGF by 50% in the prostate gland as a whole. The study-published in the journal Prostate (1998, Vol 37, pp77-83)-thereby suggests that saw palmetto may be a useful adjuvant therapy in the treatment, as well as in the prevention, of prostate cancer.



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