



Sensible News

Issue 19, July 2004

Sensible Philosophy

Sensible News aims to provide important health information that may not be readily available from conventional sources. Articles are factual. Any references not listed are available on request.

In the News:

More Menopause at Equinox:

Researchers in Hungary have made the startling discovery that the onset of menopause occurs more frequently during spring or autumn. A survey of 102 women at the menopause clinic at Baranya County Teaching Hospital in Pécs identified season as the strongest environmental or lifestyle factor. This is the same seasonal distribution as conception frequency, which peaks during equinox. (1)

Chocolate prevents heart disease:

Dark chocolate (not milk chocolate) is higher in flavonoids than red wine, green tea or even blueberries. At the end of a two week double blind study, men who had eaten 45grams of dark chocolate per day had significantly better blood flow to the heart than controls. A concentration of 70% cocoa or higher is necessary to achieve the benefits (2).

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Time to Invest in Blueberries

If the recent excitement about anti-ageing phytochemicals continues, you might want to think about investing in blueberry stocks. According to scientists at the Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston, blueberries beat the rest as the most potent antioxidant food. Related berries such as bilberries and cranberries contain many of the same benefits, as do blackberries, spinach, garlic, grapes, and even chocolate.

It is not just about vitamins, minerals and fibre anymore. The greatest benefit from food may actually be in its diversity of colour. The deep colour in fruit, vegetables and herbs is due to a vast array of pigments such as flavonoids and other phytochemicals. Make no doubt. Phytochemicals may not be officially classified as essential nutrients at this time, but they are essential. Phytochemicals were abundant in the original human diet, and our physiology works with the assumption that they will be in our blood stream every day. These lovely molecules not only protect us against ageing, but they play a critical role in the balance of hormones, cholesterol, and the immune system.

Herbs are a continuation of food.

Phytochemicals are also the active ingredients in herbal medicine. In this sense, herbal medicine is much more similar to food than it is to pharmaceutical medicine.

There are thousands of phytochemicals, many of them yet unnamed. Here are some of the main phytochemicals that you'll see on your dinner plate:

Phytochemicals:

Anthocyanidins include the deep purple hues of the **anthocyanins** and **proanthocyanidins**, chief antioxidant in the now famous blueberry. It is another name for the familiar condensed tannin in red wine. Anthocyanidins have been shown to reverse age related memory loss and macular degeneration.

Carotenoids are the oranges and yellow, which include the well-known **beta-carotene**, precursor to vitamin A, but also **lycopene** and **lutein**, which protect against cancer. Carotenoids are found in carrots and pumpkin, but also in the dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach, and tomatoes. (Continued next page)

Flavonoids are a type of phenolic compound, a group of plant secondary compounds, which also include molecules such as salicylic acid in aspirin. Famous flavonoids include:

- the yellow **quercetin**, found in onion, grapefruit, ginkgo and apples is a powerful anti-inflammatory, and protects against heart disease and cancer.
- **catechins** are in green tea, but also dark chocolate (not white chocolate) and red wine. These flavonoids improve blood flow, but prevent the growth of blood vessels to tumours, something that the anthocyanins also do.
- **ellagic acid**, a relative of catechin, has promising anti-cancer properties, and is another flavonoid in berries, pomegranates and cherries.
- **pycnogenol**, a tannin in the French Maritime Pine has been a popular anti-wrinkle and anti-ageing ingredient in capsule and cream. It protects skin, much as it protects wood!

Isoflavones are related to flavonoids. The most well known isoflavones are **genistein** and **daidzein**, which exert a mild estrogenic effect in the human body. Sources of isoflavone such as soy can provide relief in estrogen deficient states, but function mainly as an anti-estrogen because they are only 2% as strong as human estrogen. In this way, isoflavones protect breast and prostate tissue from cancer causing estrogen stimulation.

Lignans are another type of phenolic compound that can interact with estrogen receptors. They are a complex molecule, and may even be considered a type of fibre. **Enterolactone** and **enterodiol** are formed by intestinal bacteria from lignans found naturally in flaxseed meal. They protect breast tissue and improve progesterone levels.

Plant Sterols. Plant sterols such as **sitosterol** and **campesterol** have a structure that is similar to human steroids. Because they resemble cholesterol, estrogen, testosterone and cortisol, plant sterols have a buffering and modulating effect on cholesterol metabolism, hormone balance and the immune system. **Sitosterol** is added to vegetable oil spreads as cholesterol lowering agent, but the same benefit may be obtained by eating soy, rice bran, avocado, and peanuts. **Ergosterol**, which converts to vitamin D in the presence of sunlight, is another example of a plant sterol.

Steroidal saponins are another group of phytochemicals that resemble human steroids, and have some hormonal action. **Diosgenin** from wild yam is a well-known plant estrogen. **Glycyrrhizin** from licorice root has anti-inflammatory properties similar to cortisone. Steroidal saponins are also found in alfalfa sprouts, red clover, Tribulus, Black Cohosh and many other plants.

Wheatgrass:

Looking for a way to maximize your intake of phytochemicals? Freshly squeezed wheatgrass juice contains chlorophyll, lutein, lycopene, zeaxanthin, anthocyanins, and many other pigments. This leafy part of wheat does not contain gluten, and is perfectly fine for all of you on a "wheat free" diet. Surprise yourself by ordering a shot of wheatgrass instead of a flat white!

Announcement:

My consultation rooms will be moving to 12 Ridge St. in North Sydney starting July 19, 2004. The phone number 9922 4009 will remain the same.

References:

- (1) Human Reproduction 2004: Early online publication
- (2) UCSF School of Nursing. Press Release 1-June-2004

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