

# Austin Quan Yin Newsletter

## The Better Health News

### Special Interest Articles:

- CAN PRAYER HEAL?
- BORON AND MENOPAUSE
- 7 WAYS TO SLOW DOWN AGING
- VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub>
- BLOOD PRESSURE AND DHA
- BILBERRY AND KIDNEY
- MENOPAUSE AND BLACK COHOSH

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## Lutein, Zeaxanthin and Macular Degeneration

Lutein (luteus means "yellow" in Latin) is a xanthophylls and one of 600 known naturally occurring carotenoids. Lutein is synthesized only by plants and like other xanthophylls is found in high quantities in green leafy vegetables such as spinach and kale. Zeaxanthin is one of the most common carotenoid alcohols found in nature. Synthesized in plants and some micro-organisms, it is the pigment that gives paprika (made from bell peppers), corn, saffron, wolfberries, and many other plants and microbes their characteristic color. Carotenoids are oil-soluble plant pigments that the body can convert to vitamin A. They are responsible for the bright colors of produce. The best known carotenoid is beta-carotene. Beta carotene also has the most vitamin A activity of all of the carotenoids. Carotenoids also act as antioxidants, protecting the cells of

your body. Much research has been done that shows that they enhance the immune system and protect against cancer. They also enhance communication between the cells, which may prevent the overgrowth of cells (and possibly inhibit cancer), according to research.

A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study, published in the *American Journal of Ophthalmology* (epublished ahead of print, July 24, 2012), looked at 108 subjects with early age-related macular degeneration. The subjects were randomly assigned to get either 10 mg of lutein, 10 mg of zeaxanthin, both 10 mg of lutein and 10 mg of zeaxanthin, or a placebo each day for 48 weeks. Function of the retina was improved in the group that received both lutein and zeaxanthin.

## Can CoQ10 Save Your Life?

A prospective, double-blind, placebo-controlled study was published in the *International Journal of Cardiology* (May 12, 2012). Subjects of the study were 443 Swedes between the ages of 70 and 88. They were given either a placebo or a combination of selenium and CoQ10. They

were examined every six months, and given echocardiograms over the five year course of the study. The group taking the supplements had a significant reduction of death from cardiovascular disease and overall better cardiac function than the placebo group.

## Can Prayer Heal?

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Bush babies are also known as galagos or nagapies (nagapie means "little night monkeys" in Afrikaans). They are small, nocturnal primates native to continental Africa. According to some accounts, the name bush baby comes from either the animal's cries or appearance. The South African name nagapie comes from the fact they are almost exclusively seen at night. A study that appeared in *Alternative Therapy in Health and Medicine* (2006 Nov-Dec;12(6):42-8) that looked at the effect prayer had on healing in 22 bush babies.

The study involved 22 bush babies with chronic self-injurious behavior. They were divided into two groups, with members of the groups being matched by the severity and total area of their wounds. Both groups were given L-tryptophan as treatment. Prayer was directed at one group, daily for a period of four weeks. The second group acted as a control and did not have prayer directed toward it. The animals that were prayed for had a greater increase in red blood cells, hemoglobin and hematocrit. They also had a reduction in wound size when compared to the control group.

## Boron and Menopause

Boron is a trace element that may be beneficial to the immune system. Physiological amounts of dietary boron decrease skinfold thickness after antigen injection in gilts and elevated circulating natural killer cells after adjuvant injection in rats. Research appearing in the *Journal of Trace Element Experimental Medicine* (1999;12:251-261) looked at 43 perimenopausal women experiencing discomfort associated with menopause. This was a double-blind crossover study; the subjects were given 2.5 mg of boron (in the form of sodium borate). The women were given a placebo for 90

days either before or after the treatment with boron. The effect on menopausal symptoms was mixed, with 21 women experiencing an increase in hot flashes and night sweats. Ten of the women reported a reduction in symptoms while taking the boron. The other 15 women experienced no change in symptoms while taking boron. Boron supplementation did, however, increase the white blood cell count in the subjects. Boron also increased the levels of 17 beta estradiol, alkaline phosphatase and thyroxine.

## Seven Ways to Slow Down Aging

It is pretty evident that your diet and exercise choices can affect how you age. Everyone knows that smoking, stress and poor sleep habits can speed up the aging process. Here are some other choices that not only increase your health and energy, but also slow down the aging process. These are also things that will increase your energy and quality of life, but many are more motivated by looking good. To quote Billy Crystal (as Fernando Lamas), "It is better to look good than to feel good." Fortunately, you do not have to make that choice. Follow the advice below and you will accomplish both.

1. **Avoid drastic diets:** Avoiding fat, avoiding carbohydrates and extreme low-calorie diets. Your skin and the underlying collagen rely on the nutrients in your diet. You need essential fatty acids for healthy skin. Vitamins, like A and C, are in short supply on some of these extreme diets. Muscle tone, skin integrity, and even the strength of the fingernails may be affected.
2. **Avoid refined sugar and white flour products:** There is collagen under your skin. It is responsible for skin tone; when it is weak, wrinkles form. When you eat sugar, your body has to break it down in a process called glycation; and glycation actually damages collagen. Thinking of trading that donut in for a bagel? Think again; the body treats white, refined flour products the same way that it treats sugar.
3. **Eat a diet that is heavy on the fresh produce:** Bright colors in fresh produce, like green, purple, yellow, red and blue, are from flavonoids and carotenoids. These are powerful antioxidants that protect your cells from damage. Less cellular damage means slower aging. At least half (by volume) of the food you eat should be fresh produce.
4. **Exercise to tone your muscles:** A little bit of weight lifting will tone your muscles and help make sure that you do not have sagging skin.
5. **Don't over-exercise, especially when stressed:** Hormonal changes from stress accelerate the aging process. Heavy workouts actually can increase the production of stress hormones. Gentle exercise, like Yoga or Tai Chi, focuses on breathing and calm. These exercises will actually reduce the production of stress hormones and slow aging.
6. **Choose tea (especially green tea) over coffee:** Tea contains antioxidants like EGCG and theaflavins that help protect the cells and slow aging.
7. **If you eat meat and dairy, buy organic:** Traditionally produced animals are fed hormones and antibiotics. These chemicals undermine human health and promote aging.

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## Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>

A study, published in *Clinical Nutrition* (2006; 25(1): 60-7) looked at 224 patients who were newly admitted to a psychiatric hospital. The patients had significantly lower serum folate levels than healthy controls. Low serum folate correlates with depression. The same correlation did not exist between serum cobalamin levels and depression, but serum cobalamin is not necessarily a good indicator of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> status.

Testing for serum cobalamin may not be the best way to check for a B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. Research appearing in the *American Journal of Hematology* (1990;34:99-107) found that elevated homocysteine and elevated methylmalonic acid occurred in 95% of patients with cobalamin deficiency, whereas only 69% of these patients demonstrated a low serum cobalamin. The study reviews 419 cases of B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. The subjects were determined to have a B<sub>12</sub> deficiency based on symptoms. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency was determined as a syndrome affecting the tongue, nervous system and/or hematopoietic system that responded to B<sub>12</sub>. A dozen of the subjects had symptoms of B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, but serum cobalamin was higher than 200 pg/ml. The authors of the study concluded that measuring homocysteine or methylmalonic acid is a much better way to determine B<sub>12</sub> levels than serum cobalamin. Serum cobalamin is normal in a significant number of patients who are B<sub>12</sub> deficient. It should be noted that homocysteine may be elevated due to a folic acid deficiency, and that will not respond to B<sub>12</sub> alone.

Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels tend to decrease with age, this was verified by research

appearing in the *Archives of Family Medicine* (October 1994;3:918-922). Many problems with depression, cognition or other mental issues that are experienced by the elderly may be due to vitamin B<sub>12</sub> or folic acid deficiency. One study that appeared in the *European Journal of Clinical Investigation* (1994;24:600-606), looked at 296 elderly patients diagnosed with mental disease. Serum folate, homocysteine, and cobalamin were measured. Over 7% of these patients had normal serum cobalamin levels, but high homocysteine. Treatment of these patients with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> injections reduced homocysteine levels. Addition of folic acid to the treatment also lowered homocysteine in patients with low folate. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> does seem to help with cognitive function. A small pilot study, appearing in the *Journal of the American Geriatric Society* (February 1992;40(2):168-172) looked at 22 subjects with low serum B<sub>12</sub> levels in conjunction with cognitive dysfunction. The subjects received B<sub>12</sub> injections (1000 milligrams) daily for one week, weekly for four weeks then monthly for a period of six months. At the beginning of the study and after at least six months of therapy, the subjects were evaluated with the Mattis Dementia Rating Scale. Of the 18 patients who finished the study, 11 showed improvement. The amount of improvement experienced by the subjects correlated with the amount of time they had exhibited symptoms. The authors of this study believe that there is a narrow window of opportunity to treat patients with cognitive problems due to vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency and that elderly patients should be regularly screened.

## Blood Pressure and DHA

According to a double-blind, placebo controlled study appearing in the *Journal of Nutrition* (2007 Apr;137(4):973-8), a small amount of DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) can moderately reduce blood pressure. The 38 male subjects were randomized to receive either 700 mcg of DHA or a placebo each day of the three month study. The study paused for four months and the role of the subjects were reversed, with the original placebo group receiving the supplement and the original supplement group receiving the placebo. Overall, subjects taking DHA had a diastolic blood pressure that was lower by 3.3 mm Hg. Heart rate was also lower in the DHA group, by 2.1 beats per minute.

A cross-sectional epidemiological study appearing in the journal,

Hypertension (2007;50:313-319) looked at blood pressure in relationship to 4,680 subjects. Blood pressure was measured eight times over four doctor visits. The researchers found an inverse relationship between omega-3 fatty acid consumption from food.

A meta-analysis of studies relating fish-oil consumption to blood pressure appeared in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* (June 28, 1993;153:1429-1438). In 11 studies, it was found that omega-3 fatty acids reduced blood pressure in people with normal blood pressure. Another six studies found that omega-3 fatty acids reduced blood pressure in hypertensive individuals. The greatest blood pressure reduction was in individuals with the highest blood pressure.

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## Bilberry and the Kidney

Research appearing in the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* (Vol. 56, No. 3: February 13, 2008, e-published ahead of print) showed that bilberry extract may have a protective effect on the kidney. Mice were exposed to a chemical, potassium bromate (KBrO<sub>3</sub>), which is an additive used in bread making. It is a toxic substance that has been linked to hearing loss and kidney damage. The mice were given a dose of the chemical that was high enough to cause kidney damage. They

also gave an anthocyanin-enriched bilberry extract of 50, 100, and 200 mg/kg over five days. After receiving the bilberry extracts the mice exhibited a reversal in blood levels blood urea nitrogen (BUN) and creatinine to normal levels (these are blood markers that may indicate kidney damage). The bilberry also reduced malondialdehyde (an oxidative substance), nitric oxide and xanthine oxidase. The bilberry reduced the oxidative stress to the kidneys.

"Walking is man's best medicine".— Hippocrates

## Menopause and Black Cohosh

There is some research that supports the safety and efficacy of using black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) extract to relieve menopausal symptoms like hot flashes and night sweats. The substance has been used in Germany for the past 50 years for menopausal symptoms, and even for menstrual symptoms. A 12-week long, double-blind, randomized, multi-center study involving 304 women with menopausal symptoms appeared in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology* (2005; 105(5 Pt 1): 1074-83). Subjects were given 40 mg of black cohosh extract (standardized 5 mg isopropanolic extract) each day.

According to scores on the Menopause Rating Scale, the group receiving the standardized black cohosh extract fared much better than the placebo group. The extract seemed especially effective in treating hot flashes. There were no adverse effects to the supplementation.

Research appearing in the *Journal of Women's Health* (1998;7(5):525-529) compared black cohosh extract to conjugated

estrogen as well as placebo. The group receiving the black cohosh had a notable increase in the proliferation of vaginal epithelium—even outperforming the conjugated estrogen. Black cohosh has been used to reduce genital pain. The group receiving the black cohosh also had improved scores in the Menopausal Index and the Hamilton Anxiety Scale score.

A combination of black cohosh and St. John's Wort was used in research appearing in *Obstetrics and Gynecology* (2006; 107(2 Part 1): 247-55). In a randomized, double-blind placebo controlled study, the subjects were 301 women with depression, as well as menopausal symptoms. Utilizing the Menopause Rating Scale, there was a 50% reduction of symptoms in the treatment group, compared to just under 20% in the placebo group. The treatment group had a 41.8% reduction in the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale score compared to 12.7% in the placebo group

