

Dr. Michael Janson's

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Welcome to the first edition of my new newsletter on health and vitality. I plan to cover a variety of topics, including vitamins and other dietary supplements, diet and general nutrition, healthy cooking, the health benefits of exercise, the value of relaxation techniques and how to do them, and general personal growth issues. I also plan to cover environment and organic food issues, as well as the politics of health care and the food supply. The information will be based on science and clinical experience, and my aim is to make this as practical and useful to you as possible.

Over the past several years, I have introduced many new supplements into my practice. I will be telling you about them in this and in future issues of the newsletter. A number of them are newly available flavonoids, carotenoids, or standardized herbs, but there are also new uses for older supplements. I welcome any comments on the newsletter, and any questions you may have that you would like me to answer. If they are of general interest I will do my best to include them in future issues or post them on my website (www.drjanson.com). Unfortunately, I will not have time, nor would it be appropriate, to answer personal specific health questions or give medical advice without the appropriate medical consultation.

Flavonoids for health

Many of our vegetable sources of nutrition are rich in pigments that are not only attractive but are also important sources of health benefits. They help to prevent serious diseases and the

degenerative problems associated with oxidative free-radical damage. Hundreds, if not thousands, of flavonoids occur in plants that are common in ethnic diets around the world. Unfortunately, Americans eat very few fruits and vegetables, so they miss the many benefits of these substances. (The most common "vegetable" that kids eat today is—you guessed it, french fries! which is not really a vegetable at all, but a carrier for highly processed and overcooked hydrogenated fats, while potatoes themselves have virtually no fat.)

Even more exciting, the medical literature now supports the view that supplements of flavonoids can be healing substances that can substitute for drugs for many patients or reduce the doses of medication that they need. Many of the flavonoids have recently been included in the term "phytochemicals," which just means "plant chemicals." Flavonoids (often called bioflavonoids) protect against cancer and heart disease and they enhance the activity of vitamin C.

The allergy fighting flavonoid

One good example is quercetin. It is a yellow-green flavonoid found in red and yellow onions (but not in white onions), although the amounts found in foods are relatively small compared to therapeutic doses. In allergic reactions, histamine is released from mast cells in the tissues. The membranes of these cells are stabilized by quercetin, so their histamine is not released as readily, thus reducing the allergic response. (Interestingly, a synthetic flavonoid called "cromolyn sodium" is used for allergies under the brand name Intal®). Effective doses of quercetin range from 800-1200 mg daily, far higher than the amount found in foods. This is important because sometimes people may try supplements in too low a dose, and then give up without getting results.

Silymarin for liver and diabetes

Another flavonoid group is derived from the seeds of the herb milk thistle. It is called silymarin, and is really a collection of several compounds. Silymarin protects the liver from poisons, such as toxic mushrooms and environmental chemicals, and inflammatory diseases, such as hepatitis. It does this in several ways. It stabilizes the liver cell membrane to prevent the entry of poisons into the cell. It also stimulates liver cell regeneration, and it acts as an antioxidant.

Diabetics benefit from silymarin because it helps to control blood sugar levels. As with other flavonoids, silymarin helps to strengthen small blood vessels. The typical dose of silymarin is 150-300 mg twice a day.

Many other flavonoids help different conditions. Originally they were thought of as vitamin P because of their effect to strengthen the blood vessel walls, and thus prevent excessive "permeability" or leakiness. They are derived from citrus fruits, buckwheat, and the most colorful fruits and vegetables. Because many of them are not yet available as supplements, it is important that you eat a diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables (many relatives of the flavonoids are also found in whole grains and beans, which you should also include in your diet—several recent studies in women showed that a daily serving of whole grains reduced the risk of cancer and heart disease, while refined grains and sugars increased the risk).

Natural help for menopause

One of the values of bioflavonoids is in reducing the incidence of hot flashes in women going through menopause. Menopause is the absence of the menstrual cycles for one year, although the symptoms of menopause often occur before the periods are completely finished and for some time thereafter. As the function of the ovaries declines gradually, the entire time frame may be from a few years before the end of the menstrual cycles to some years afterwards. Menopause generally happens between 48-52 years old, but it may be as early as forty or as late as the late fifties. It also happens when the ovaries are removed surgically. This is most commonly done as part of a total hysterectomy or when there is ovarian cancer.

The menopausal transition is normal, but symptoms may not be. In other cultures with different dietary habits, women may not have any symptoms at all. However, in Western cultures symptoms are very common although some women make the transition with relative ease. In addition to hot flashes and night sweats, symptoms may include depression, mood swings, irritability, and vaginal dryness.

The value of soybeans

One of the most important dietary choices you can make to help with menopausal symptoms is to include more soy products in your diet. This means more tofu, soy milk, tempeh, and soy nuts. Soy foods are rich in isoflavones called genistein and daidzein. These have mild estrogenic properties that help with menopause (but not any of the side effects of estrogen replacement therapy). They

also appear to help with preventing breast cancer because they block the effects of the stronger estrogens that stimulate the breast tissue. I recommend organic soy products to avoid the very common genetically engineered soybeans (more about genetically modified crops in a later issue).

I often recommend that women experiencing hot flashes add a mixed bioflavonoid to their supplements, 1000 mg twice a day, and take it with vitamin E (400-800 IU). A number of other dietary supplements, including magnesium and natural progesterone, help with common symptoms, .

Several herbs are also helpful with menopause-related symptoms. I often recommend standardized extracts of one or more of the following: black cohosh (40 mg twice a day), dong quai (200 mg three times a day), and Vitex agnus-castus (400 mg daily). Dong quai may cause some sun sensitivity, so it is a good idea to wear sunscreen and protective clothing while taking it.

Diet and Disease—Recent Statistics and Research

According to the USDA, Americans are eating more animal products than they did 100 years ago. Meat consumption is up from 99 to 111 pounds, poultry from 11 to 64 pounds, and cheese from 4 to 28 pounds. High animal protein diets may lead to osteoporosis and other serious risks (see page 4). Recent studies confirm the value of vegetarian diets (high-fiber, high-complex carbohydrate) in helping diabetics with sugar control, while whole grains in the diet (rich in complex carbohydrates) provide protection from heart disease and cancer.

Read labels or else!

In the last 30 years, cheese consumption jumped 17 pounds, and most of it is in prepared foods (such as pizza). Women consumed more fat from salad dressing than from any other food. In 1997, each American consumed a record average 154 pounds of sugar, amounting to 53 teaspoons of sugar every day. In 1909, two-thirds of the sugar people consumed was purchased as sugar, and thus in control of the person who bought it. Today, less than a quarter is brought home as sugar. Three quarters of the sugar that Americans eat is found in processed foods. These include common items such as ketchup, mayonnaise, crackers, canned soups, salad dressings, spaghetti sauce, flavored yogurt (which you may have thought of as a health food, but it's not!), canned vegetables, boxed cereals, fruit drinks, and peanut butter.

If you want to be healthy, you have to make the right choices, and that means that you must read labels carefully. Sugar is hidden in many foods, so watch out for its other names, such as sucrose, fructose, dextrose, and corn sweeteners. One of the largest sources is soft drinks—Americans consume an average of 53 gallons of sodas per year, including an average of one cola beverage per day (whereas in China, which does not have our diet-related health problems, the average is one per year!).

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In the Health News

We now have more evidence of the benefits of vitamin E. Diabetics taking 1800 IU find that it improves both diabetic retinopathy and kidney disease (Diabetes Care 1999;22:1245-1251). Type I diabetics were given the vitamin for four months, and then placebo for four months. The circulation and the blood flow in the retina both returned to normal levels, and the effects remained after the vitamin was discontinued. Their kidney function also improved (both the kidneys and eyes are rich in blood vessels).

A recent issue of the American Journal of Gastroenterology contained an interesting research article on diet. Just by lowering your consumption of animal products, you lower your risk of colon cancer. Animal products appear to increase cancer production due to something in the foods themselves. In this study, the group who consumed fewer animal products were surprisingly not consuming more of the cancer fighting substances found in fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and yet their rate of colon cancer was reduced.

It is still a good idea to eat your fresh, unprocessed vegetarian foods to add the cancer protection of fiber, antioxidants, folic acid, calcium and magnesium, but as this research shows, avoiding animal products is also a good idea on its own.

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By the way:

I want to encourage you to choose organic foods whenever possible. I'll be telling you more about this in future issues. In the meantime you can contact two organizations to find out more: the Organic Consumers Association at www.organicconsumers.org, and the Campaign for Food Safety at www.purefood.org, or call (218) 726-1443. I was recently on a talk radio show in Lake Worth, Florida, concerning the dangers of food irradiation and genetically engineered foods.

On October 9th I will be speaking in Philadelphia at the 100th anniversary of the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. Mainstream medical education is coming around to the use of natural substances and alternative medicine.

On October 23rd I will be speaking on nutrition and the heart at the Natural Products Expo in Baltimore, where suppliers meet the health food store staff members. Then I travel to Reno, Nevada for the meeting of the American College for Advancement in Medicine, where I speak on lifestyle and supplements to several hundred physicians.

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