

Nutrition in the News

There's always something new to learn in the exciting world of nutrition. New research findings are intriguing to us because we all eat and we realize that what we eat affects our health, so these studies are very much applicable to our daily lives. I usually try to report on one new study a month in my Research Updates section, but there have been many fascinating new studies released this year and I want to give you information on several of the most promising ones.

Each week, several nutrition studies are reported in the news and in scientific journals. However, many of those studies are not worth our consideration for a variety of reasons ranging from the fact that the study subjects were rats (rats and humans are very different species) or that only a handful of people participated in the study (50 or 100 people is not a representative sample of the population). I always bring you the most relevant information by highlighting results from large studies that follow populations of humans over long periods of time, like the Nurse's Health Study. Below are results from six recent well-designed studies.

2 Potassium: 1 Sodium = Heart Health

Eating twice as much potassium as sodium could cut your risk of dying from heart disease in half. A recent study from the Archives of Internal Medicine found that subjects who consumed the most potassium and the least sodium had a 50% lower risk of dying from cardiovascular disease compared to subjects who ate the most sodium and the least potassium. The ratio of the minerals to one another is what mattered more than the levels of the individual minerals when it came to predicting potentially fatal cardiovascular diseases (including stroke and heart attack).



High sodium intake is correlated with higher blood pressure and most Americans eat too much sodium—about 4,000 milligrams per day on average—and too little potassium—about 2,600 milligrams per day. Current Dietary Guidelines recommend a daily limit of 2,300 milligrams of sodium and a daily minimum of 4,700 milligrams of potassium. The researchers aren't sure why the 2:1 ratio is so important for protecting the heart, but they speculate that potassium helps block sodium absorption.

Potassium is abundant in plant foods, such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, winter squash, artichokes, pomegranates, oranges, grapefruits,

bananas, spinach, broccoli, mushrooms, avocados, dried fruit, tomatoes and beans, as well as in milk, yogurt and fish. Sodium is prevalent in processed foods, fast foods and most restaurant meals. If you want to boost your heart health and reduce your risk of dying from cardiovascular disease, try improving your potassium-to-sodium ratio by eating more healthful foods and fewer processed foods.

Vitamin D's Health Benefits

Vitamin D is quickly becoming the vitamin C of the 2000s. There is much exciting new research about the important role that



Gelson's registered dietitian, Jessica Siegel, has a Masters in Public Health. However, she is not a doctor and her nutritional recommendations are not tailored to specific health problems. Consult your physician before beginning any nutritional program. To contact Jessica, please call her at 1-800-GELSONS.

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Nutrient of the Month: Zinc

the “sunshine vitamin” plays in helping to prevent both major and minor diseases. So far this year, there have been three intriguing new studies that highlight vitamin D’s importance.

One recent study found low levels of vitamin D in the blood to be associated with a higher risk of dementia in people over age 65. People in the study with the lowest serum vitamin D were more than twice as likely to be cognitively impaired compared to those with the highest vitamin D levels. The researchers caution that vitamin D deficiency does not cause dementia, but it does play a role in brain development and the protection of neurons (which may protect against dementia in at-risk individuals).

Another study has found that vitamin D also offers cold and flu protection. Researchers in the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III) found that healthy individuals with the lowest vitamin D levels (less than 10 nanograms/milliliter) were 40% more likely to develop a respiratory infection than those with the highest levels (greater than 30 nanograms/milliliter), while those with asthma had five times the risk of respiratory infections if they were in the low vitamin D group. It seems that the vitamin helps boost the immune system to help ward off these seasonal

ailments in healthy people and those most at risk due to asthma, emphysema and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

The final study shows a link between vitamin D status and diabetes risk in men. Men who participated in Harvard’s Health Professionals Follow-up Study had 20% lower insulin levels when they had the highest blood levels of vitamin D compared to those who had the lowest vitamin D levels. Men who had both the highest blood levels of vitamin D and dietary calcium intake had 35% lower insulin levels than those with the lowest levels of calcium and vitamin D. High insulin levels are associated with type 2 diabetes and vitamin D is believed to play a role in insulin secretion in the pancreas.

The “sunshine vitamin” appears to play an important role in brain development, cold and flu protection, and insulin secretion in the pancreas.

Our bodies make vitamin D from sun exposure, but most of us wear sunscreen or stay out of the sun, so deficiencies are more common these days. People with light skin need an estimated ten minutes of unprotected, direct sun exposure a day, while those with darker skin need 15–20 minutes, but even that length of time may not be adequate for some individuals. If unprotected sun exposure is not appropriate or desirable for you, consider meeting your needs through diet and supplements. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to meet vitamin D requirements through diet alone. The best food sources of vitamin D are (ranked from most to least): herring, salmon, canned sardines, tuna, mackerel, fortified milk, canned shrimp, fortified orange juice, fortified cereal and egg yolks. Supplements are a good option for helping to reverse deficiencies and maintain good vitamin D status, but have your vitamin D levels checked and, before taking any quantity or type of vitamin D supplements, discuss it with your doctor.

Alcohol Ups Cancer Risk

Here is some potentially confusing news: Drinking just one alcoholic beverage a day of any kind increases the risk of certain cancers in women. This information is not new, but many people have heard the message that a glass of red wine is good for the heart and assumed that that translates to the general message that a drink a day is healthy, which is not true. According to the “Million Women Study” of 1.3 million British women aged 50–64, women who drank one alcoholic beverage a day (about 10 grams of alcohol) increased their risk of breast, liver, oral and rectal cancers.

The researchers estimate that 11% of all breast cancers are alcohol-related and 5% of all cancer cases in American women are attributable to a low level of alcohol consumption. The researchers are not sure why alcohol increases the risk of certain cancers, but they are considering investigating several possible mechanisms, including that alcohol increases the potency of carcinogens, alcohol increases estrogen levels and that alcohol increases inflammation.

If you don’t currently drink, it is never recommended that you start doing so. If you do drink, one drink a day is considered the safest maximum level, but keep in mind that there is still an increased cancer risk involved at this level. Deciding to consume alcohol is a personal decision that you may want to discuss with your doctor so that you can consider your individual risk factors for both heart disease





and cancer and weigh the potential risks and benefits according to your own medical history.

Vitamin C Cuts Gout Risk

If you have gout or are at high risk for having a gouty attack, you should consider increasing your vitamin C intake. According to a new study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, consuming more vitamin C is strongly associated with a reduced risk of gout in men. The 20-year long study of nearly 47,000 men revealed that those with a vitamin C intake greater than 1,500 milligrams per day had a 45% lower risk of gout than men who ate less than 250 milligrams per day. Researchers found that every 500 milligram increase in vitamin C intake lowered gout risk by about 17%.

Gout is a painful inflammatory arthritic condition that is caused by excess uric acid that crystallizes in the joints. It is most common in men over the age of 40 and it is associated with obesity, high blood sugar, excessive alcohol consumption, a high red

Researchers found that every 500 milligram increase in vitamin C intake lowered gout risk by about 17%.

meat intake as well as certain medications. The researchers speculate that vitamin C helps to reduce uric acid in the blood by facilitating uric acid excretion through the kidneys, thereby preventing gout.

Since vitamin C is prevalent in fruit and vegetables, increasing produce intake to help prevent gout is a great idea. It will also aid in weight loss and blood sugar control since produce should replace meat and other foods, such as sweets and refined carbohydrates, that can contribute to high blood sugar and overweight. For individuals who can't eat

enough produce, a vitamin C supplement is an acceptable way to increase your total C intake—just be sure not to exceed 1,500 milligrams a day from all sources.

Nutrition research is important because the results help to form our knowledge base regarding the effect of what we ingest on our health. Keep in mind that one study, even a very large, well-designed one, does not automatically become nutritional fact; studies must be repeated and results must be replicated before recommendations can be made. Many of the studies I report on may not sound like “new” news because they often are just confirming results from previous studies. The benefits to us knowing about new studies is to inform our eating habits and consider making changes based on our own personal risk factors. None of the studies that I report on should cause harm or increase your risk of disease if you make dietary or lifestyle changes based on their findings. After all, most studies conclude that eating more produce and plant foods improve health, and there is certainly no risk involved in eating more broccoli!

Nutrient of the Month: Zinc

Next up in my “Nutrients You Didn’t Know You Needed” series is zinc. Yes, the metal used to plate steel so that it doesn’t rust is also a small (but essential) part of our diets. Zinc is a trace mineral, which means that it is essential to our health but only in very small quantities.

Zinc works with over 100 different enzymes in our bodies to help facilitate important chemical reactions, including those involved in growth, development, immune function and vision maintenance. It is also important for blood clotting, thyroid function, taste and smell acuity, wound healing, fetal development and sperm production. Zinc is present in all cells in our bodies, but it is especially concentrated in our muscles, bones, and eyes and in the prostate gland.

It seems that zinc plays an important part in preventing age-related vision loss. Zinc plays an indirect role in eye health because it is necessary for vitamin A metabolism, so a deficiency of zinc can also lead to a vitamin A deficiency. Elderly individuals do not absorb zinc optimally, often leading to vitamin A deficiencies and a resulting loss of vision since inadequate vitamin A is associated with age-related macular degeneration.

Zinc is also important for a strong immune system. It helps us maintain proper immune function and boost immunity when necessary by aiding in the production of DNA and RNA so that cells can repair themselves. For instance, there is some preliminary evidence that zinc can help to shorten the severity and duration of a cold when taken at the first sign of symptoms. Zinc also plays a role in collagen formation, so it is essential for healthy skin. It aids in timely wound healing and seems to reduce the risk of melanomas.

Women need at least 8 milligrams of zinc a day and men need at least 11 milligrams. Children need between 3 and 8 milligrams, while pregnant and breastfeeding women need about 12 milligrams. Zinc deficiencies are rare in the developed world, though pregnant women, children and the elderly



Zinc helps facilitate growth, development, immune function and vision maintenance.

are most at risk for inadequate intake. Vegans, vegetarians and those with excessive intakes of caffeine, alcohol or calcium may also be at risk for inadequate zinc levels. People in these groups may want to consider supplementing the difference between what they eat and what they need in order to avoid deficiencies. Most zinc deficiencies are seen in developing countries, particularly in the Middle East because the diets in this region tend to be low in zinc and contain high-fiber foods that can interfere with zinc absorption. Zinc-deficient children and adolescents exhibit growth retardation, delayed physical and mental maturation, susceptibility to infection, night blindness and general malnutrition.

Adults should not exceed 40 milligrams of zinc per day in order to avoid copper and iron deficiencies, since these minerals all interact with one another and compete for places to

bind to proteins inside the body. Too much zinc can also lead to decreased immunity, anemia, nausea, vomiting, upset stomach, headaches and irritability. Men who take excessive amounts of zinc supplements are at increased risk for aggressive prostate cancer.

The best sources of zinc are animal foods, especially shellfish. Other excellent sources of zinc are fish, dark meat turkey, beef, dark meat chicken, pork, yogurt and cheese. Plant sources of zinc, though not as high in zinc as animal sources, include lentils, garbanzo beans, black-eyed peas, dried beans, sunflower seeds, soy foods, green beans, peas and whole grains. This month, try my zinc-rich recipes for Sweet and Sour Orange Chicken Thighs and Snap Pea and Cabbage Salad.

Jessica's Store Appearances Body Fat Testing

Jessica will be offering complimentary body fat testing and answering your questions about weight loss, food and nutrition.

Pasadena

Thursday, April 23, 12:00pm

Silver Lake/Los Feliz

Thursday, April 23, 4:00pm

Encino

Friday, April 24, 12:00pm

Sherman Oaks

Friday, April 24, 4:00pm

Dana Point

Monday, April 27, 12:00pm

Irvine

Monday, April 27, 3:00pm

West Hollywood

Tuesday, April 28, 12:00pm

Calabasas

Wednesday, April 29, 12:00pm

Century City

Thursday, April 30, 12:00pm

Marina del Rey

Thursday, April 30, 5:00pm

* Testing method is Bioelectrical Impedance and is not appropriate for people with pacemakers or osteoporosis, pregnant women or children. Be well-hydrated for most accurate results.

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If you have any questions, please feel free to call Jessica at 1-800-GELSONS (435-7667) or visit our website www.gelsons.com for more nutrition information and store locations.