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Michael Janson, M.D.
Editor, Healthy Living

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Dear Friends,

Organic foods are the fastest growing segment of the grocery market, and for good reasons. I recently read an article in Newsweek, called "What's Killing the Frogs," reporting that in the past 30 years 32 species of frogs have become extinct, and that 200 more are in decline, and many genetic defects are appearing.

It is likely that genetic defects and the decline in the frog population in Yosemite Park are the direct result of pesticides from farms in California contaminating the water sources for Yosemite frogs.

This is of particular concern to me, as I have an organic garden, and I know that neighbors about a mile away spray their crops. My well is 500 feet deep, but that is no guarantee that my water will not become contaminated. So far, testing has been fine, but I am aware that this could be a problem in the future.

One of my best health recommendations is that you choose organic foods as much as possible. Now that they are growing so much in popularity, they are much more available than in the past. Almost every town has a health food store providing some organic foods, and many people have gardens in which they grow their own food. Organic foods are healthier as well as safer.

On my recent consulting trip to Japan, I was pleased to see the rapidly increasing interest in and availability of organic foods. Each night, I was treated to a different restaurant that had tasty vegetarian foods, often organic. My hosts were kind enough to include organic brown rice at every lunch. Many restaurants in the U.S. now offer organic mesclun salad mix with baby lettuces, spinach, arugula, radicchio, and more. You can virtually always find whole grains and beans (including tofu) from organic sources, and often a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, and even many supermarkets now carry some organic foods.

Organic foods are increasingly important for our own health, the environment, and medical care. Pesticides, herbicides, and poor soil management, are only some of the threats. Antibiotic use (half of them go to animals as growth stimulants) is one of the leading causes of resistant organisms. Hormones that fatten animals and increase growth may cause human hormone imbalances.

Another problem is the rapid, uncontrolled, growth of genetically engineered (GE) foods. Half of the soybean and corn crops are from GE sources that have never been studied for safety. Allergies, toxicity, and organic crop contamination are serious issues that have not been addressed. The companies are lobbying heavily to prevent even the labeling of GE foods that would give consumers a reasonable choice. Other countries have banned them or required labels, but not the U.S. Choosing organic foods is the only sure way to avoid GE products. You can support labeling bills or even bans on these untested foods (for more on this go to www.thecampaign.org), and avoid buying them.

Acetyl-L-Carnitine and Aging

Recent research coming out of the Linus Pauling Institute reveals some exciting information that gives you new tools to protect your brain and other tissues from aging and degenerative diseases. The amino acid derivative acetyl-L-carnitine, which provides both the fatty acid transport of L-carnitine and a portion of the acetylcholine neurotransmitter molecule, appears to help aging tissues in several ways.

Acetyl-L-carnitine (ALC) acts as a fatty acid carrier in the mitochondria, the subcellular “generators” that produce energy from fats. The fats must be transported across the mitochondrial membrane by L-carnitine or ALC where, with the help of coenzyme Q10, they are converted to energy.

In aging animals, mitochondrial function declines, and the level of L-carnitine in the mitochondria is half the level seen in young animals. The recent studies in rats show that ALC (especially when combined with the antioxidant alpha-lipoic acid) can protect the brain from the oxidative damage related to aging, and can protect the mitochondrial membranes.

In practical terms, when older animals are supplemented with ALC and lipoic acid they are more physically active, have better short-term memory, and overall enhanced cognitive function. (They also have better liver function because of the same protection of the mitochondria, with increased mitochondrial metabolism and reduced oxidative damage.)

Studies over the past 10 years have shown that supplementing the diet with ALC is likely to help slow the progression of Alzheimer’s disease (AD). Although in numerous studies the results have not been completely consistent, most of the evidence points to at least short-term benefits from supplements of about 3000 mg daily. Anything that might help to reduce Alzheimer’s disease is worth trying if it is as non-toxic as ALC.

ALC and Alpha-Lipoic Acid

It appears that these nutrients also help the heart, especially when taken together. While ALC helps restore cardiac carnitine levels, and improves cardiac energy, the aging heart also becomes sensitive to oxidative stress. For protection from such stress, you need to combine the

ALC with alpha-lipoic acid (LA). This is a sulfur-containing antioxidant that works in both the water- and fat soluble compartments of cells. The combination works better than either taken alone. In this way, you can reduce the effects of aging on the heart (the typical dose of alpha-lipoic acid ranges from 200 mg for general antioxidant benefits to 1000 mg per day for diabetic neuropathy).

It is apparent that the accelerated aging that results from lifestyle choices, stress, and oxidative exposures, can be slowed or even reversed. With this in mind, it is hard to understand why some gerontologists have recently come out with a dogmatic statement that “Anyone who claims that they can stop or reverse the aging process is lying to you—even if they are a doctor.” Apparently they are complaining about practicing doctors who take the research other scientists are doing and apply it for their patients’ benefit.

At a recent conference, a leading and well-respected antioxidant researcher from Massachusetts, Dr. Jeffrey Blumberg, was talking to doctors who practice complementary/alternative medicine. He pointed out the gratification for researchers when their work is applied clinically, so that doctors like those in the audience were making reality out of the laboratory work, and adding practical value to it.

It is therefore somewhat of a surprise when other researchers make light of the practitioners, who necessarily have to make decisions about patient care with imperfect information.

You can also help yourself preserve brain and heart function with other health practices. Daily exercise, and a whole, natural foods diet, mostly vegetarian, with lots of vegetables and fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds (rich sources of essential fatty acids), fish, and small amounts of organic eggs, provide lots of intestinal-cleansing and cholesterol-lowering fiber, as well as a variety of antioxidant vitamins and flavonoids.

In addition to ALC and LA, include coenzyme Q10—an antioxidant that is also essential for mitochondrial energy production, vitamins C and E and ginkgo, which have been shown to help preserve brain function and circulation, and mineral cofactors, such as zinc, selenium, magnesium, and B complex. You can slow and reverse some aging, even if “top” scientists cannot.

Schools Are Harming Children

Three recent articles in the Wall Street Journal are worth noting. One was on the increasing obesity among schoolchildren while fast foods are invading the school cafeterias. School lunches are often pizzas, double cheeseburgers, french fries, or chicken nuggets, sometimes provided by the schools, but increasingly through actual contracts with fast food outlets.

The schools are also filled with vending machines advertising cola beverages, with more than 9 teaspoons of sugar in the regular sizes. The battle is between concerned parents who want their kids eating better foods, and the bureaucracy looking at the economics of the school cafeterias, which are financially endangered from lack of funds.

Another article noted that in schools where kids are taught to prepare foods and learn about how fruits and vegetables grow, they lean toward healthier choices. In the "CookShop" program, in Harlem, and the related "Food is Elementary" in Trumansburg, NY, kids eat stir-fried vegetables with rice, and learn to prefer them to junk.

The health costs of obesity far outweigh any savings from skimping on healthy foods and creating a generation of kids who are addicted to high fat, salt, sugar and other junk.

The third article asked "Is Food the Next Tobacco?" noting that the lethal addictive nature of high-fat, sugary foods means obesity will soon pass tobacco as a leading cause of death. Think of it this way: an extra 120 calories a day (a cola has 160), means a pound per month, and if you do that for 20 years, you gain 240 pounds. This bankrupts the health care system, and ruins health. We need new warning labels!

Ask Dr. J

Q. I have anxiety, especially during PMS. Can supplements help? R.F., Canada (via Internet)

A. Anxiety can be the result of many physical as well as mental conditions. As it is related to your menstrual period, it is likely also influenced by your hormonal changes and diet changes around the time of your period.

You should be particularly careful to avoid sugar and caffeine, and eat small meals and snacks with

whole, natural foods to control your blood sugar. You can also take chromium (200 mcg), which helps regulate blood sugar levels.

Exercise is often a great relief for anxiety. If you have claustrophobia as you indicated, getting outdoors for walking, bicycling, or jogging should help. This helps fight both depression and anxiety, and often helps with PMS. You should also learn a breathing exercise, visualization, or yoga to help you relax.

B complex (50 to 100 mg) and magnesium (250 to 1000 mg) can help with mental function and relaxation, and extra B6 (200 mg) often relieves many PMS symptoms, as do vitamin E (400 IU), and GLA (gamma linolenic acid, 240 mg).

If the symptoms persist, you can try taking St. John's wort (300 mg three times a day), commonly used to treat depression, but also good for anxiety. Take care about sun exposure while taking it. Timed-release niacin (B3, 250 mg once or twice a day) may also help. Persistent symptoms require medical advice.

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In the Health News

- In patients who have undergone balloon angioplasty, there is a high rate of reclosure (restenosis) of the treated arteries. Patients who have a high level of the metabolite homocysteine in the blood are at double the risk of restenosis compared to similar patients with lower homocysteine (Schnyder G, et al., Association of plasma homocysteine with restenosis after...angioplasty. Eur Heart J 2002 May;23(9):726-33). **Vitamin supplements can significantly lower homocysteine. Taking folic acid (500 mcg or more), vitamin B6 (50 to 200 mg), and B12 (1000 to 3000 mcg) is effective treatment. Those with lower homocysteine levels also had fewer heart attacks and heart deaths.**
- High vitamin C levels are associated with a reduced risk of stroke. Men with the highest levels of vitamin C had about half the risk of stroke as those with the lowest levels. In addition the risk was even greater among men who had both hypertension and low C levels. For men with obesity and low C levels, the risk was 2.7 times greater. (Kurl S, et al., Plasma vitamin C modifies the association between hypertension and risk of stroke. Stroke 2002 Jun;33(6):1568-73). **The information continues to accumulate on the value of vitamin C from both food and supplements.**

Diet and Disease

- Studies from the Norwegian government show that fried foods containing carbohydrates (and baked foods to a much lesser extent) have high levels of acrylamide, a carcinogenic compound. The foods that were particularly high were potato chips, french fries, and biscuits. (Reuters Health, June 6, 2002). **This information confirms what has been found in Sweden and in a British study. It is best to eat a diet with little or no "industrial" or fast foods, and one that is rich in fruits, vegetables, beans, and grains with minimal processing.**

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Email: drjanson@drjanson.com
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Michael Janson, M.D.

Hummos and Baba Gannouj-Two Light Dips

Summer schedules cry out for "easy and light." Try these two dips. Hummos is a mix of chick peas, tahini (sesame paste found at the health food store), garlic, and lemon. Use 2 cups of organic canned chick peas or pressure cook your own (soak for 4-8 hours; discard the water to reduce gas). Add about 1/4-1/2 c. tahini (to taste), 3-6 Tbsp lemon juice, and 2-4 cloves of crushed garlic. Blend in a food processor until creamy, adding water or olive oil as needed for mixing. You can add cumin, cayenne, parsley, or scallions to taste. For baba gannouj, instead of chick peas broil eggplant in a closed oven, turning every 5 minutes until the skin is slightly burned and the flesh soft. Peel, mash, and mix with all the other ingredients. Serve on whole grain pita bread, celery, carrot, or other veggie wedges.

- I see patients at WholeHealth in Arlington, MA. Call 781-641-1901 for an appointment. I also do phone and Email consults.
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Email me at info@drjanson.com
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