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The Natural Athlete Newsletter December 09

Happy Holidays!

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Anti-Inflammatory Olive Oil

A big issue that many of us face is inflammation in the body. Inflammation is a very generalized term for the activity of a certain part of our immune systems. We create inflammation when we have an injury - this is what causes the redness, swelling, heat and pain at the injured area. The body sends specific white blood cells and other chemicals to the area to repair the damage. This occurs when we have a bruise, a sprain, tendonitis, or any other type of "-itis". Asthma can be caused by inflammation in the lungs. We can have inflammation inside our blood vessels that causes heart disease. The list goes on and on.

Short-term inflammation is good for us; it is what initiates the healing processes in the body. However, too much of this good thing becomes detrimental. There are many reasons why the body can't 'turn off' the inflammatory process, which left unchecked becomes damaging.

There are a number of ways to treat this inflammation; however our diet can be a big contributor to long-term inflammation in the body. Removing inflammatory foods and replacing them with foods that have anti-inflammatory effects is the first step. One such recently highlighted 'food' is olive oil. Researchers have discovered that a specific compound, oleocanthal, found in olive oil has potent anti-inflammatory effects, similar to that of ibuprofen but without the side effects (Ibuprofen and other NSAID drugs are damaging to the stomach, kidneys and cartilage).

Those drugs work by interrupting the chemical processes in the body that produce pain and signal the start of the inflammatory process.

The younger the oil (extra virgin), the more oleocanthal it contains, and the stronger the anti-inflammatory effect. This information further explains why the 'Mediterranean Diet' is so healthful. Oleocanthal is sensitive to heat, so to gain the benefits one should avoid cooking the oil and rather drizzle it on food.

The 'dose' of olive oil to gain its anti-inflammatory effects is roughly three tablespoons a day. Olive oil is a healthy fat, and contains about 100 calories per tablespoon. So be mindful of the extra calories!

P.S. I put olive oil in my fruit smoothies...it has a fruity taste and you won't even know its in there.

Doctors Kill 225,000 People a Year!

Published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) -the most widely circulated medical periodical in the world - 225,000 people die in hospitals each year in the US! Put another way, this is the 3rd leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer!

These deaths are the direct result of a complication of treatment. Here is a breakdown of those numbers:

12,000 -- unnecessary surgery
7,000 -- medication errors in hospitals
20,000 -- other errors in hospitals
80,000 -- infections in hospitals
106,000 -- non-error, negative effects of drugs

Keep in mind, these are only the people that die IN hospitals...this doesn't take into account the thousands of other problems that occur in outpatient settings!

Why am I telling you this? This isn't to beat up on, or criticize doctors who typically have good intentions. It's a commentary on our medical system and the dangers which few people actually perceive. The hospital can actually be a dangerous place. Never leave a loved one alone, and question everything when it comes to your care!

So stay as fit as you can through diet and exercise - the two biggest factors on your health that you have total control over. Prevention of illness is by far easier, more cost effective, and much safer than having to resort to 'heroic' medical procedures which typically carry a high risk.

Vitamins Maintain Muscle Strength

A new study has shown that dietary intake of vitamins C and E are associated with muscle strength.

Muscle strength is commonly used as a marker of aging, with decline first noted in the 40's with dramatic decreases in the 60's. Decreased muscle strength is a major risk for frailty and disability in older age. People studied who had higher levels of vitamins C and E were stronger at baseline and over time when compared to people who consumed fewer of those vitamins.

Note that this study looked at people who had higher dietary levels of vitamins, meaning those they consumed from diet only. Study subjects did not take any supplements containing those vitamins.

The take home message is that eating a healthy diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts (which are all high in vitamins C and E...and others!) can help maintain muscle strength starting at an early age.

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