

# Alternatives<sup>®</sup>

## FOR THE HEALTH-CONSCIOUS INDIVIDUAL

October 2004

Volume 10, No. 16



Dr. David G. Williams

## You “Oat” to Try This

I won't dwell on the current huge popularity of low-carb diets and foods that have taken the country by storm; I'm sure you've read and heard enough about that from family, friends, and the media. There's one offshoot of this trend that rarely gets mentioned, however, and that's constipation. It is estimated that as many as 30 million people in this country are on either the Atkins or the South Beach diet. While both advocate salads and various vegetables, in practice they are often low-fiber diets, and that can quickly lead to regularity problems. Reports are that about half the individuals who go on these diets, or variations of them, experience constipation problems.

The fact hasn't gone unnoticed by the pharmaceutical companies. GlaxoSmithKline has experienced a jump in sales of its fiber laxative, Citrucel. Procter and Gamble has also started promoting its Metamucil product as a “zero net carb” product to help with the regularity problem. Both of these companies see this as a huge opportunity to begin marketing their regularity products to younger consumers instead of just the geriatric crowd. Thanks to this new diet fad, their target audience is changing to a younger age group. These two products are just part of the \$350-million laxative market, and companies know that the sooner you get a customer hooked on one of these products, the greater the chance the customer will end up staying with them for life.

I have a better suggestion for you, if you have regularity problems from a low-carb diet or other cause. Rather than opting for one of these fiber products, start including oats and oatmeal in your diet. Oats are not carb-free, but their benefits far

outweigh their carb content. Oats are one of the simple solutions that inexpensively eliminate and prevent dozens of problems.

Oats contain both soluble and insoluble fiber—8 grams total in one cup of uncooked oatmeal. They contain the most soluble fiber (55 percent) of any food. I'll come back to insoluble fiber (or roughage, as my mom calls it) in a moment, but first I want to address the soluble portion. The soluble fiber (fiber which dissolves in water) consists mostly of beta-glucan, which has numerous, very beneficial functions.

### A Humble Food, a Star Component

Beta-glucan is the fiber-like complex sugar found in the cell wall of baker's yeast, oat and barley fiber, and many of the medicinal mushrooms that have become so popular as immune stimulants in the last few years. (For those of you more technically minded, oats contain a mixture of beta-1,3-glucan and beta-1,4-glucan. Yeast and mushrooms generally contain a mixture of beta-1,3-glucan and beta-1,6-glucan. Beans are also a good source of beta-glucan, and barley actually contains three times as much as oats.)



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*You will observe with concern how long a useful truth may be known and exist, before it is generally received and practiced on.—Benjamin Franklin*

Beta-glucan's two main benefits are cholesterol reduction and immune system enhancement.

When it comes to cholesterol, beta-glucan acts like a mop. It binds to cholesterol and moves it out of the body with the feces. Typically, after only about a month of eating oats, it's not unusual to see a 10 percent drop in total cholesterol levels and a drop of 8 percent in the LDL form of cholesterol. At the same time, the "good" form of cholesterol, the HDL cholesterol, may increase as much as 18 percent. (*Adv Exp Med Biol* 90;270:119-27) (*Eur J Clin Med* 97;51:607-11) (*Crit Rev Food Sci Nutr* 99;39:189-202) As I'm sure you're aware, cholesterol is not a primary cause of heart disease, but it is a symptom. Many of the eating and lifestyle habits (such as eating oatmeal) that inherently lower your cholesterol levels have a direct link to reduced risks of heart and artery problems.

Beta-glucan—beta-1,3-glucan in particular—has been shown to be effective at activating your body's first line of defense against foreign pathogens. Beta-glucan activates the white blood cells known as macrophages and neutrophils. These are the natural killer cells and the "clean-up brigade" that recognize and destroy cancerous tumor cells, accelerate the repair of damaged tissue by removing cellular debris, and trigger additional components of the immune system. (*Pathol Immunopathol Res* 86;5:286-96) (*Immunopharmacology* 99;41:89-107) (*Eur J Immunol* 91;21:1755-8)

Beta-glucans also appear to help stop the rapid elevation of blood sugar following a meal. In diabetics, this can be a godsend in helping control blood sugar levels. A cup of cooked oatmeal at breakfast can help to stabilize blood sugar levels throughout the day. Apparently one of the benefits of beta-glucan is to increase cells' sensitivity to insulin, making them more efficient at mobilizing glucose or blood sugar. (*J Am Diet Assoc* 96;96:1254-61) (*Adv Exp Med Biol* 90;270:119-27)

I'm not sure which components in oatmeal are responsible for its ability to soothe and help heal problems like eczema, hives, poison ivy, and other itch-related miseries. It must be some of the water-soluble components like the beta-glucans and others. Regardless of the source, it's well-known that an oatmeal soak can work wonders.

For an oatmeal bath, tie one pound of uncooked oatmeal in a gauze bag (nylon stocking, pantyhose, etc.), tie the bag shut, and hang it directly under the water spigot. Turn the water on hot and let the water run slowly over the bag. Once the tub is full, swish the bag through the water and then leave it in the tub. Soak in the bath for 20 to 30 minutes before gently patting your skin dry.

Due to its ability to enhance immune function, beta-glucan has also been used widely throughout the HIV/AIDS community, as well as by those dealing with other viral-related problems such as herpes and Epstein-Barr. The recommended dosages for these problems vary depending on the product, the condition, and the individual.

## Getting Your Glucans

Beta-glucans have recently been isolated and are sold as supplements. One such supplement is sold under the names RyVital and Oralmat. It contains 1,3 beta-glucan from a rye grass extract, along with several other ingredients. The product was developed originally by two brothers from Melbourne, Australia. It comes in a liquid form, and the general dosage is 3 drops under the tongue three times a day. One of its primary uses is the treatment of asthma; I have seen it work for this. Results are normally seen within 3 to 4 weeks of use. Others have reported success using the product for sinusitis, allergies, and hay fever, but, other than for asthma, I haven't found it to work as well as Xlear, the xylitol nasal wash. A bottle of Oralmat will cost about \$30. In this country,



### ALTERNATIVES®

ISSN# 0893-5025. Published monthly for \$69.99/yr. by Mountain Home Publishing at 7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, MD 20854. Editorial Office: 7811 Montrose Road,

Potomac, MD 20854. Periodicals postage paid at Rockville, MD and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Alternatives*, PO Box 2050, Forrester Center, WV 25438. Copyright © 2004 All rights reserved. Photocopying or reproduction is strictly prohibited without permission from the publisher.

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Dr. Williams works closely with Mountain Home Nutritionals, a division of Doctors' Preferred, Inc. and subsidiary of Phillips Health, developing his unique formulations that supply many of the hard-to-find nutrients he recommends. Dr. Williams is compensated by Doctors' Preferred, Inc. on the sales of these nutritional supplements and health products, which allows him to continue devoting his life to worldwide research and the development of innovative, effective health solutions.

it is being sold under the Allergy Research Group label. One source for Oralmat is Vitacost.com, at 800-793-2601 or [www.vitacost.com](http://www.vitacost.com).

Beta-glucan can also be purchased in either bulk powder or in capsules. One of the most reasonably priced beta-glucan products is sold through a company called Dynamune, at 800-548-6406 or [www.dynamune.com](http://www.dynamune.com). They sell beta-glucan made from baker's yeast cell walls, as the bulk powder and in capsules. In bulk, 100 grams of the 85 percent beta-glucan powder runs about \$35, and a bottle of 60 capsules containing 600 milligrams runs about \$30. (Be aware that they are a small company, so please be patient.) Generally the recommended dosage is anywhere from 100 milligrams a day to 1,000 milligrams (1 gram) a day. There are no known side effects of beta-glucans, so, for general purposes, starting with 1 gram a day during the active stages of a problem shouldn't be a concern. You can then cut back to about half that for maintenance purposes. Obviously, with conditions like AIDS and severe viral infections, these dosages would be increased.

If you're into growing sprouts, you can also increase your beta-glucan intake through that means. Two tablespoons of sprouted rye seeds or ¼ cup of barley sprouts will give you a decent dose. A couple of shiitake mushrooms daily are also a good source of beta-glucans. Cooking them destroys much of the beta-glucans, however, so they must be eaten raw.

## A Good Cleansing

Beta-glucans are only one of the beneficial components of oats. In addition to containing 55 percent soluble fiber, oats contain 45 percent insoluble fiber. It is the insoluble fiber that provides roughage and improves bowel movements. This natural bulk also gives feelings of fullness and satisfaction, resulting in less food intake.

In the 1980s, there was a huge push promoting the benefits of fiber in the diet, particularly its ability to prevent colon cancer. Since that time, there have been conflicting studies, and, for some reason, fiber has fallen out of favor. I predict (something I do very rarely) that in the next few years you will begin to see a dramatic increase in the ill effects of decreasing the amount of fiber in our diets. We're already seeing an increase in many of these problems, such as widespread obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and numerous gastrointestinal complaints. Constipation is the most common gastrointestinal complaint in the US, and diverticulitis will undoubtedly become more and more common.

Fiber has decreased dramatically as our food supply has become more and more processed. To make matters worse, diets like Atkins and South Beach often shun the complex carbohydrates that contain insoluble fiber or roughage. The most commonly consumed "vegetable" in this country is now French fries. Food manufacturers have increasingly removed insoluble fiber from pro-

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (As required under Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code). 1. Publication title: *Alternatives*. 2. Publication no.: 0893-5025. 3. Filing date: October 7, 2001. 4. Issue frequency: Monthly. 5. No. of issues published annually: 12. 6. Annual subscription price: \$69.00. 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: 7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, Montgomery, MD 20854. Contact person: Ann Marie Feldman. Telephone: (301) 340-2100. 8. Location of the headquarters or general business offices of publishers: 7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, MD 20854. 9. Names and addresses of publisher, editor and managing editor: Publisher: ASP-ACI PHL Acquisitions, LLC, 7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, MD 20854. Editor: Dr. David Williams, 7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, MD 20854. Managing Editor: Bill Todd, 7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, MD 20854. 10. Owner (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1% or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given.) ASP-ACI PHL Acquisitions, LLC 7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, MD 20854. PH Opco, LLC, 7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, MD 20854. 11. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1% or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities: None. 12. Not applicable. 13. Publication name: *Alternatives*. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: September 2004. 15. Extent and nature of circulation: A. Total no. copies printed (Net Press Run): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 276,750; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 286,000. B. Paid and/or requested circulation: 1. Paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on Form 3541 (include advertiser's proof and exchange copies): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 238,703; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 255,107. 2. Paid in-county subscriptions (include advertiser's proof and exchange copies): None. 3. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales and other non-USPS paid distribution; Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: None; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: None. 4. Other classes mailed through the USPS: Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 11,423; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 13,195. C. Total paid and/or requested circulation (sum of 15b. (1), (2), (3) and (4)): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 250,126; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 268,302. D. Free distribution by mail (samples, complimentary, and other free copies): 1. Outside-county as stated on Form 3541: Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 172; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 172. 2. In-county as stated on Form 3541: None. 3. Other classes mailed through the USPS: Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: None; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: None. E. Free distribution outside the mail (carriers or other means). Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 11,213; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 7,955. F. Total free distribution (sum of 15d and 15e): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 11,385; No. copies of single issues published nearest to filing date: 8,127. G. Total distribution (sum of 15c and 15f): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 261,511; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 276,429. H. Copies not distributed: Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 15,239; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 9,571. I. Total (Sum of 15g and h): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 276,750; No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 286,000. J. Percent paid and/or requested circulation (15c/15g x 100): Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 96%; Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 97%. 16. Publication of Statement of Ownership: October 2004. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Ann Marie Feldman, Manager, September 15, 2004.



cessed foods, to both lessen the gritty texture and make ingredients easier to combine.

Insoluble fiber, the portion of the plant that can't be broken down by your digestive system, provides a valuable service. The fiber absorbs water and swells, making the stool bulky, soft, and easy to pass. (This is why you always need to increase your water intake when you increase the fiber in your diet.) Without adequate fiber, bowel movements slow and toxic material remains in contact with the intestinal walls longer. The foreign material causes inflammation, and additional toxins are reabsorbed into your bloodstream. These additional toxins increase the workload of both your liver and kidneys. The slow-moving stools also lead to a condition called diverticulitis.

### **Diverticulum: Latin for "You Don't Want to Know"**

In the early stages of the disease, as your intestines struggle to remove waste material, small, pea-sized, irreversible pockets called diverticula develop. Waste material becomes trapped in these pockets, which often expand and become inflamed, resulting in diverticulitis. If the pockets rupture, the resulting infection and inflammation in the abdominal cavity can prove fatal.

Unfortunately, an individual may be symptom-free for years, if not decades, until they double over with pain from either a blockage or a rupture of a pocket. The treatment at that point is surgical removal of part of the colon. It is now estimated that 1/3 of all individuals over the age of 45 in this country have diverticulitis, and 2/3 of those over age 85. If you suffer from chronic constipation, there's a good chance you fall into this group.

(Most people with a constipation problem either don't recognize they have it, or they don't want to admit it. Rarely have I ever received a "yes" answer to the question, "Are you constipated?" I've always received a more accurate assessment by asking the person how often they have bowel movements. The simple truth is, you eat two or three meals a day, so you should be having two or three bowel movements a day. Anything less than that falls under the category of constipation and needs to be corrected. Don't kid yourself with the delusion that "everyone is different" or "this is normal for me." It could end up killing you.)

Obviously, since the pockets that form are irreversible, the best solution would be to prevent the condition, and, surprisingly, that is quite simple. The simple answer is increased fiber in the diet. In countries where the inhabitants eat plenty of raw fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other fiber-rich foods (unlike in the US), diverticulitis is practically non-existent.

Oatmeal can be a part of such a diet. But, keep in mind, it is only a small part. Any diet that overlooks roughage and leads to chronic constipation will greatly increase the risk of future colon problems such as diverticulitis and even cancer.

Not surprisingly, the treatment for diverticulosis (the condition before inflammation sets in) is to increase fiber and get the bowels moving regularly. At the same time, I would also highly recommend the use of probiotics and fermented foods like sauerkraut and others to help re-establish good bacterial flora in the lower bowel at the same time. I don't recommend the long-term use of over-the-counter fiber products like those mentioned earlier. It is my experience that long-term use of these products seems to deplete various minerals, which can lead to all kinds of seemingly unrelated problems. This just doesn't happen when the fiber comes from a wide variety of foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, seeds, dried beans, popcorn, brown rice, and bran.

### **The Breakfast that Keeps on Giving**

Getting back to oats...just a few months ago it was discovered that oats contain a type of antioxidants referred to as avenanthramides. New studies have found that these antioxidants prevent free-radical damage to the LDL form of cholesterol. This alone helps explain how eating oats can significantly reduce your risk of developing heart disease. (*J Nutr* 04;134(6):1459-66) (*J Agric Food Chem* 99;47(12):4888-93 and 4894-8) As a side note, it appears that when these special antioxidants in oats are combined with vitamin C, their ability to protect LDL cholesterol from oxidation is even greater. It might be a good idea to take your vitamin C with your bowl of oatmeal or have an orange or some orange juice at the same time.

Researchers at Tufts University have also found that these unique antioxidant compounds in oats had anti-inflammatory effects, and sup-

*(Continued on page 126)*



## NEWS TO USE FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### A Sour Side of Sugar Substitutes

**WEST LAFAYETTE, IND.**—Researchers at Purdue University have uncovered some very interesting results concerning the use of artificial sweeteners.

Professor Terry Davidson and associate professor Susan Swithers have found that artificial sweeteners appear to disrupt your body's natural ability to regulate food intake and body weight.

Their research suggests that our bodies have the innate ability to match caloric intake with caloric need. This unconscious learning process begins early in life. Infants learn early on that foods that are sweet in taste, that are dense, or that have high viscosity are also high in calories. Using these characteristics, your body is able to determine how much food is required to meet its caloric needs.

When artificial sweeteners are added to foods, your body's ability to gauge their caloric content based on viscosity and sweetness is impaired. After a period of consuming artificially sweetened foods with few or even no calories, the body can no longer rely on this instinct. When you then eat a high-calorie food sweetened with sugar, your body doesn't recognize it as a high-calorie food. As a result, you begin to overeat.

These researchers tested and confirmed these ideas in a series of rat studies. They've concluded that artificial sweeteners not only don't help the public lose weight, but, instead, are probably adding to the problem. They are now studying whether the body and brain can be retrained to once again naturally measure calories based on sweetness and viscosity.

They don't claim this disruption is the sole cause of the rising problem with obesity, but it certainly is a contributing factor. Rather than rely on artificial sweeteners for weight loss, it appears that limiting the number of calories consumed and regular exercise is still the key to long-term success.

### True Community Health Care

**FARMINGTON, MAINE**—Being an election year, one of the primary topics of debate, as always, happens to be the prohibitive cost of medical care, particularly among the poor in this country. Most solutions involve another government-funded or social program. The 70-bed Franklin Memorial Hospital has developed their own solution to such problems, which the politicians should take note of.

The hospital has started a program they call "Contract for Care." Under this program, the working poor can do voluntary work at the hospital to help offset their medical bills. Reportedly about 30 to 40 patients each year

participate in the program, and 98 percent of those fulfill their obligations.

The program is strictly a volunteer program and doesn't replace any hospital jobs. Instead, it allows either the patient or someone on their behalf to pay off the bill by performing additional work ranging from landscaping duties to reading to sick children.

The seven-year-old program is offered to patients who don't have insurance and don't feel comfortable accepting charity care, but who would otherwise be unable to pay their bill. Their participation in the program is kept private, and they are treated the same as any other hospital volunteer. The "contract" is based on a handshake and a smile, and if a participant drops out of the program there are no negative consequences.

The work assignment of the patient depends on their particular skills. Some have worked in the mail room; others have done computer data entry or simply volunteered for cleaning duties in the emergency room. One gentleman offered his skills as an auto body repairman to fix hospital vehicles. The program has proved to be very successful for both the patients and the hospital.

Many hospitals around the country are struggling to stay solvent, and are often forced to just write off bad debts. With this program, patients have the satisfaction of being able to pay for the services they receive, and the hospital is able to provide additional services and help lower its expenses. The CEO of the hospital, Rick Batt, who devised the program, says it works particularly well in their rural setting, where the tradition of bartering for services is an accepted practice. He said the program isn't about making, or saving, money for the hospital. Instead, it's a way of demonstrating that the hospital cares about the community, and, at the same time, allowing these patients to give back to a worthy cause, and maintain their dignity.

### Help for Psoriasis Sufferers

**ROME, ITALY**—A few months ago, I discussed the numerous problems that could be associated with a gluten allergy. I recently received a report from a doctor in Italy who placed a 53-year-old female patient on a gluten-free diet. It seems she had a 20-year history of psoriasis that other therapies hadn't been able to help. Within three months there was significant improvement; within six months her problem was completely resolved.

Anyone suffering from psoriasis, or anyone who has tried to treat the problem, knows just how frustrating the condition can be. Knowing that a gluten-free diet might hold the key to some of these cases could be a godsend to thousands. It would certainly be worth a try. (*Digestion* 03;68:9-12)

pressed the molecules that allowed cells to attach to the walls of arteries. This attachment process is the first step in the formation of plaque that leads to atherosclerosis or clogging of the arteries. This finding is very exciting. Not only does it show how atherosclerosis can be prevented at the earliest stage possible, but it also demonstrates that it can occur with an inexpensive, readily-available, good-tasting, natural food like oatmeal. (*Atherosclerosis* 04;175(1):39-49)

To list all the benefits of oats would take a while. They provide a source of the vitamin E-like compounds called tocotrienols. They contain selenium, which is essential for the repair of damaged DNA and the prevention of various cancers, particularly colon cancer. They contain significant amounts of manganese, which helps strengthen tendons, ligaments, and other connective tissue.

I've talked about the benefits of oats in the past, but it seems like every year we discover more of their benefits. I urge you to start including oats in your diet. They are one of the few nutrient-rich foods that you can still easily find that haven't been contaminated, overly-processed, or de-natured.

When you buy oats, don't get instant oatmeal, which has already been partially cooked and often contains sugar, salt, or other ingredients. "Old-fashioned oats" take a little longer to cook, but the fifteen minutes will be well worth the wait. Also, I wouldn't buy oats in large quantities. The beneficial fats in oats can go rancid with time. Fresh oats should smell fresh. Generally, if they are in an airtight container in a cool, dry, dark area, you can expect them to last about two months. Mark the date of opening on the container and replace it after two months. A box of oats is inexpensive and, after all, we're talking about a very potent "supplement" that can stop heart disease, boost the immune system, fight cancer, and eliminate a long list of other complaints (blood sugar problems, obesity, constipation, etc., etc.). Don't risk losing these effects by eating year-old oatmeal!

## Hear Ye, Hear Ye!

Until just recently, there was no known way to prevent noise-related hearing loss, short of wearing ear protection. If you worked in a noisy environment or attended too many rock concerts,

you simply had to accept the risk of permanent hearing loss. New research has found that specific nutritional supplements appear to greatly reduce, if not totally prevent, this loss of hearing.

The discovery hinges on the fact that cell death in parts of the inner ear is a result of the toxic waste products called free radicals. If you recall, the inner ear contains hair cells that help transmit mechanical vibrations into nerve impulses, which the brain can then translate into sounds. Overstimulation of the hair cells, from either loud noise or habitual noise exposure, results in the generation of excessive amounts of free radicals. Under normal circumstances, these free radicals would be neutralized by the cell's antioxidant defenses. Once the cell's antioxidants are depleted, the damaged hair cells begin to die, and can continue to do so for days or even weeks after noise-induced damage.

(Efforts are underway at numerous facilities around the world to find ways to regenerate the hair cells of the inner ear. Certain animals, such as birds, already have this ability, but humans don't. If this regeneration can be accomplished, then noise-induced hearing problems can be repaired. Until this happens, however, it's important to prevent the problem before the damage occurs, through ear protection and the nutrients described here.)

Researchers have now found that, by providing the proper antioxidants, cell death and subsequent permanent hearing loss can be prevented.

In earlier studies, some vitamins, particularly C and E, were shown to be of some help. The most effective compound, however, appears to be glutathione. This is the compound that I mentioned years ago as one of the most potent anti-aging compounds ever discovered. In practically every instance where the body is in a diseased or degenerated state, you will find it is accompanied by lower levels of glutathione. In addition to its strong antioxidant capability, it also has exceptional detoxifying powers. (N-acetylcysteine, one of the most economical and efficient compounds used to increase glutathione levels, is actually approved by the FDA to protect against liver damage from overdoses of acetaminophen [Tylenol].)

Based on recent studies showing that N-acetylcysteine (NAC) can protect against noise-induced

hearing loss in animals, the military began testing a “hearing pill” on recruits at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego earlier this year.

## Bang, Bang, You’re Deaf

In the preliminary testing, which simulated firing a rifle 150 times over a 70-second period, the pill reduced permanent hearing loss by over 70 percent, and limited the damage caused to hair cells in the inner ear. The full results of the Marine recruit study have not yet been released.

The supplement used in the study, developed by the US Navy, has already been licensed by American BioHealth Group, also of San Diego. They hope to have a prescription product on the market sometime in 2006, and follow that with other hearing products over the coming years.

From past research, it also appears that supplementing the diet with NAC, acetyl-L-carnitine (ALC), and other antioxidants like vitamin C and E, can protect hearing loss from several sources: not only from noise, but also from certain chemotherapy drugs and possibly aging.

Rather than wait for a prescription product to hit the market in a couple of years, there’s no reason not to be protecting your hearing now. With our present limited knowledge and medical capabilities, once you lose your hearing due to noise, it is lost permanently.

## Hope for Your Hearing

In addition to NAC, ALC, vitamin C, and vitamin E, other nutrients and simple changes can help improve and protect your hearing.

It is well-documented that certain nutritional deficiencies result in a reversible form of hearing loss. These include deficiencies in vitamin D, vitamin B12, folic acid, and calcium.

If you experience a sudden hearing loss unrelated to excessive or constant noise exposure, first rule out any potential allergic reactions. A common cause of hearing loss is an allergy to aspirin, aspirin-containing medications, and other NSAIDs (ibuprofen, etc.). (*Am J Otolaryngol* 91;12(1):33-47) (*Drug Saf* 93;9(2):143-8) (*Prog Neurobiol* 00;62(6):583-631)

Many antibiotics, particularly the aminoglycosides such as gentamicin, can cause hearing loss. Antidepressants, anti-malarial drugs, heart medications (calcium channel blockers), immunosuppressants (cortisone, interferon, etc.), and oral contraceptives can also be problems. Be sure to check the list of adverse effects that accompany any of the medications you might be taking.

Heavy metal toxicity, especially from lead or mercury, is also associated with hearing loss.

Even without knowing the cause, increasing the circulation to the inner ear can help. The ability of the herbs ginkgo and periwinkle to improve blood flow to the small blood vessels in the body explains how these herbs improve hearing and balance, and often alleviate tinnitus. It’s also very important to cut down on your salt and increase your water intake. The fluid retention associated with excess salt and dehydration can impede blood flow in the small blood vessels of the ear and throughout the body.

It should go without saying that you should quit smoking. For years, studies have documented the increased risk of hearing loss among smokers. (*Isr Med Assoc J* 02;4(12):1118-20)

Increasing your antioxidant levels should be done through both your diet and supplementation. Including more “colored” vegetables and fruits, olive oil, salmon, and other omega-3-rich foods is highly recommended.

You can make sure you’re getting your own “hearing pill.” There are numerous other vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that are beneficial in protecting your hearing. The safest bet is to faithfully take a good daily multivitamin and

## Correction

Through no fault of Dr. Williams’, two telephone numbers in the September, 2004 issue (Vol. 10, No. 15) were incorrect. Correct contacts are:

- Harmony Company (to purchase AHCC): 888-809-1241
- Dr. Gerard F. Judd (for information about oral health, or to purchase his book, *Good Teeth, Birth to Death*): 623-412-3955

We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused you. We will try not to let it happen again.



mineral supplement, including some or all of the following nutrients. You can add the others as needed.

- N-acetylcysteine (NAC)
- Acetyl-L-carnitine (ALC)
- Turmeric
- Ginkgo
- Zinc
- Vitamin D
- Omega-3 fatty acids as fish oil and/or flax
- B-complex vitamins (particularly B12)
- Vitamin C (at least 1 to 3 grams daily)
- Vitamin E (200 to 400 IU daily)
- Folic acid (200 micrograms).

If your job or environment subjects you to loud or constant noise, it would be a wise preventive measure to take NAC (500 to 600 milligrams) and ALC (2 grams) at least one hour prior to exposure. The studies above found that these supplements were able to provide protection when given anywhere between 15 minutes before and up to four hours after the noise exposure.

Preventing hearing loss through supplementation is an absolute bargain. The alternative happens to be hearing aids. Without a doubt, one of the biggest rip-offs occurring today is the way hearing aids are currently being sold. While technology has driven the cost of practically all electronics down to reasonable ranges, the price of hearing aids has remained artificially high.

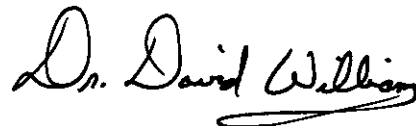
The blame for this falls squarely on the shoulders of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Their outdated policies prevent the sale of over-the-counter hearing aids. As a result, the price of a set of hearing aids now averages around \$2,300. In other parts of the world, excellent over-

the-counter hearing aids are being sold in the neighborhood of \$100. Thanks to lobbying efforts and the archaic stance of the FDA, thousands of individuals in this country go without hearing aids due to their outrageous expense, which isn't covered by Medicare or most insurance policies.

It's estimated that over 30 million people in this country suffer from hearing loss that could be helped with hearing aids. Studies have shown that the hearing loss in as many as 80 percent of these individuals falls into a very consistent pattern associated with aging. Devices that address these patterns of frequency and sound levels are readily available and don't require the "special examination and fitting" some audiologists and the FDA would have you believe. Reading glasses are available over the counter, and there's no reason hearing aids shouldn't be sold the same way. I'm sure there will always be a market for custom-fitted \$2,500 hearing aids, but it's wrong not to open the market so millions of those less fortunate can restore their hearing.

Internet sales of hearing aids have been of some benefit, since most of these companies will sell the devices without requiring an examination or doctor's visit. Even the hearing aids sold there cost \$300 or more, and they are generally stripped-down, lower-quality devices. It's a shame when you can walk into any WalMart in the country and purchase a fully-loaded computer with a color monitor (and oftentimes a printer), for less than \$500, but a simple set of hearing aids still costs over \$2,000. It's certainly not a very flattering testament to the way we take care of our elderly.

Take Care,



If you have questions or comments for Dr. Williams, please send them to the mail or e-mail addresses listed to the right. Of course, practical and ethical constraints prevent him from answering personal medical questions by mail or e-mail, but he'll answer as many as he can in the Mailbox section of *Alternatives*. For our part, we'll do our best to direct you to his issues, reports, and products related to the subject of your interest.

Here's how you can reach us:

- For Customer Service matters such as address changes, call 800-527-3044 or write to [custsvc@drdavidwilliams.com](mailto:custsvc@drdavidwilliams.com).
- To order nutritional supplements from Mountain Home Nutritionals (MHN), call 800-888-1415 or visit [drdavidwilliams.com](http://drdavidwilliams.com).
- If you are a licensed health professional and would like to learn how to begin reselling MHN supplements to your patients, please send an e-mail to [practitionerinquiries@davidwilliamsmail.com](mailto:practitionerinquiries@davidwilliamsmail.com).
- To order back issues or reports, call 800-718-8293.
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