

'Wonder supplement' can treat ME without side effects — researcher

by Michelle McDonagh

Every second person seems to be taking omega-3 fish oil supplements these days, whether to improve concentration and memory, to protect against heart disease or for healthier skin, hair and nails.

However, a UK researcher is now claiming that EPA, the essential fatty acid known as omega-3, is an effective side effect-free treatment for depression, can reduce hyperactivity and improve concentration in children with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and can treat the symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or ME.

Professor Basant K. Puri, a consultant in psychiatry and imaging at Hammersmith Hospital and Imperial College London and a leading expert on the use of EPA in depression, is in Ireland at the moment giving a series of talks on the use of EPA to treat ME. His Galway talk takes place this Thursday, (September 29) at the Harbour Hotel.

ME is an illness that affects the brain, muscles and immune system that often follows a flu-like illness. Its symptoms include sore throats, muscle and joint pain, sleep problems, concentration and memory problems and a feeling of overwhelming flu-like exhaustion and weakness after minor activity.

10,000 sufferers

More than 10,000 people in Ireland are thought to suffer from the debilitating condition, which is now often diagnosed under the name Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Professor Puri and his team at Hammersmith Hospital published the first systematic study on people with ME in 2002 using a type of brain-imaging technology called MRS. The results showed a difference in the brain chemistry of ME patients compared to healthy volunteers.

Similar to studies carried out in Scotland and Japan, they found levels of a chemical called choline to be higher in ME patients which suggested a problem with fatty acid metabolism in the brain.

In his new book, 'Chronic Fatigue Syndrome — a natu-

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ral way to treat ME', Professor Puri explains that increased choline levels in the brain are precisely what you would expect to see following a major viral infection.

While many ME sufferers are still told that their condition is psychosomatic ie 'all in the mind' and that antidepressants are the only answer, he has found many features of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome that he believes are consistent with the condition being caused by an infectious agent such as a virus.

His research findings have led Professor Puri to suggest that fatty acid supplementation, particularly supplementation involving a high level of EPA could greatly benefit ME sufferers.

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Professor Puri's has been criticised because in his book he recommends only one omega-3/omega-6 supplement, VegEPA, which is manufactured by UK company, Igennus.

However, speaking to *Tribune Life* Professor Puri remains adamant that VegEPA — which is a combination of ultra-pure EPA (free of any DHA) and virgin evening primrose oil — is the only product currently on the market that he will recommend because all of the others contain DHA, an omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acid.

He claims the leading research in the field has found that when ingested, the type of DHA contained in supplements tends to inhibit many of the beneficial actions of EPA. In fact, he feels so strongly about this issue that he would rather people took no EPA supplement at all, than one containing DHA.

There is a school of thought that argues that we can obtain the EPA we need simply by eating more fish, but Professor Puri points out that in order to get a high enough quantity of EPA, you would have to eat a large amount of oily fish such as salmon, trout, herring, tuna, mackerel and sardines each day.

The pollution of rivers and seas with toxins such as heavy metals like lead, mercury and cadmium is another argument against getting your EPA intake through fish and ordinary fish oil capsules suffer from the same problem, he explains.

Eight capsules

For the treatment of ME naturally, Professor Puri recommends a dosage of 2000mg of pure EPA each day which can be obtained by taking eight VegEPA capsules, four in the morning

and four in the evening. He recommends the same dosage for the treatment of depression, halving this dosage after recovery to a maintenance dose of 1000mg a day for the rest of the patient's life.

While many of his colleagues in the medical profession remain unconvinced about the findings of Professor Puri's research, he says a number of GPs in the UK, Europe and America are now routinely prescribing pure EPA for their patients with excellent results.

"A number of double blind placebo control trials have taken place in England, the US, Israel and Taiwan and they have all come up with highly significant positive results for EPA compared with a placebo. However, these results tend to languish in dry dusty journals, it's a matter of getting the findings out to GPs which is difficult."

Professor Puri would like to see VegEPA made available through the NHS in the UK like traditional antidepressants and the product made available in health shops throughout Ireland and the UK.

Eskimo diet

He points out that the story of wonder supplement, EPA, is not a new one. In fact, it's over 50 years since Dr Hugh Sinclair of Oxford University discovered that high levels of EPA contributed to a healthy cardiovascular system through his study of the traditional Eskimo diet.

He found that the Inuit did not suffer from anywhere near as much heart disease and high blood pressure as those in the West in spite of the fact that they ate large amounts of animal fats such as fish and seals.

Professor Puri remarks: "At that time, the general consensus among the medical profession was that heart disease was caused by the ingestion of too much cholesterol and fats from animal origin. It took a very long time for Sinclair's message to be taken on board in the US, almost 50 years, and I hope it's not another 50 years before the message gets out about the positive effects of omega-3 on depression, ME and ADHD."

For further information on talks by Professor Puri and a free information pack on ME/CFS, contact the Irish ME/CFS support group, PO Box 3075, Dublin 2, telephone (01)2350965 or email info@irishmecfs.org

Professor Puri's books, 'The natural way to beat depression' (2004), 'Chronic Fatigue Syndrome — a natural way to treat ME' (2005) and 'Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder — a natural way to treat ADHD' are available in leading bookstores around the country.



Professor Basant Puri: Extolling virtues of omega-3.

An improvement within weeks for woman with chronic fatigue syndrome

A 25 years old woman called Elizabeth who suffered from medically confirmed chronic fatigue syndrome, after she contracted a viral infection at the age of 19 years, was referred to Professor Puri in early 2003.

When he first saw her in March 2003, Elizabeth was suffering from chronic

fatigue, intense lassitude, poor sleep, low mood and muscle pain and was almost totally confined to a wheelchair during her waking hours — she didn't even have the energy to push the wheelchair herself.

Professor Puri assessed the degree of her depression using a special rating scale and she was scanned in an MRI scanner to provide him with a very accurate assessment of the structure of her brain. He then prescribed her a high EPA course of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids along with Vitamin E.

When he saw

Elizabeth again after 16 weeks, Professor Puri claims she was a transformed person. She and her mother reported that her chronic fatigue had begun to go into remission for the first time in six years, between six to eight weeks after she started to take the EPA supplementation.

By 16 weeks, she reported being more motivated, having a brighter mood, sleeping much better and also able to walk better. When her brain was rescanned after 16 weeks, Professor Puri discovered that she had actually experienced brain regrowth.

