Unsaturated Fat and Vitamin E: Two Weapons Against Parkinson Disease

By Greg Arnold, DC, CSCS, July 12, 2005, abstracted from “Dietary fatty acids and the risk of Parkinson disease: The Rotterdam Study” in the June 28, 2005 issue of Neurology

Link – http://www.nowfoods.com/HealthLibrary/HealthArticles/HealthNotes/M046623.htm

First described in 1817, Parkinson disease (PD) is a movement disorder caused by the body’s inability to no longer produce dopamine, a brain neurotransmitter. As a result, the brain can no longer control body movement, resulting in the tremors and shaking that characterizes PD. This disorder affects more than one million people in the United States and because it is more common in older persons, it is feared there will be a sharp increase over the next decade as the baby boom generation ages.¹

Conventional treatments for PD include prescription medications that mimic dopamine and surgery (but only as a last resort).² Although there is no cure for Parkinson’s disease, preventive methods are surfacing, particularly in the area of nutrition. Two nutritional supplements showing a lot of promise recently have been fatty acids and vitamin E.

High intakes of unsaturated fat appear to have a variety of health benefits, including decreasing inflammation³ and protecting nerves in the body,⁴ reducing oxidative stress,⁵ and improving brain function, particularly the area of the brain that deteriorates in PD.⁶

Now, a new study,⁷ which examined the association between unsaturated fat intake and the risk of PD among 5,289 patients, found both monounsaturated fatty acids (olive oil) and polyunsaturated fatty acids (omega-3 fatty acids) to be “significantly associated” with a lower risk of PD. No associations were found for dietary saturated fat, cholesterol, or trans-fat.

Vitamin E came under attack in early 2005 when it was proposed that “Those who take greater than 400 IU of vitamin E a day are about 10 percent more likely to die than those who do not”.⁷ This statement was quickly refuted⁸ while another study found that vitamin E protects women against fatal heart attacks.⁹

Now, a new study¹⁰ which conducted a review of 8 different studies examining vitamin E intake and PD found that “diets rich in vitamin E protect against the development of PD.”

When looking at how much omega-3 fatty acids you should take, consider 2-3 grams per day while taking at least 400-800 IU of vitamin E per day for protective effect.

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Reference:
² National Parkinson Foundation Website www.parkinson.org

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8 Council for Responsible Nutrition Website [www.crnusa.org/vitaminEisSafe.html](http://www.crnusa.org/vitaminEisSafe.html)

9 Lee IM. Vitamin E in the Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease and Cancer: The Women's Health Study: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *JAMA* 2005; 294(1): 56-68