

Treating Arthritic Pain with Ginger

Wayne Martin,

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Wayne Martin has been one of our most remarkable advisors since our founding. From published scientific studies he integrates and communicates many useful therapies for medical practitioners.

Editor:

On March 14 our local newspaper had a report on treating arthritis. I think that it may have been an Associated Press report, quoting a professor of rheumatology at a University in Michigan. It put down things such as evening primrose oil and the thrust of it was that if one had rheumatoid arthritis, one is just somewhat out of luck. I sent the following letter to the local newspaper. It was not published, I rather expect that it was shown to a local rheumatologist who said it was the bunk. If you may be so kind as to give this letter the light of day and in the process, bring a degree of pain relief to some patients with arthritis.

"I am age 88 and have been an amputee since 1929 when I lost my left leg in a motorcycle accident. From that day onward, I have been plagued with episodes of painful spasms at the severed nerve endings. These episodes are excruciatingly painful. The way out was to take about 25 aspirin in a short period of time. I would get sick from too much aspirin. When that happened, it was a good sign. The spasms were about to end. I feel fortunate that I did not kill myself with an overdose of aspirin.

"I have been almost completely free from these painful episodes now for over ten years. I read a report in the British medical journal *Medical Hypotheses*, [1989, vol. 29, pp 25-29]. Two doctors from India were at the hospital of Odense University in Denmark. The article was by R.C. Srivastava and T. Mustafa and the title of the article was "Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) in Treating Rheumatic Disorders." Ginger is an important medication in the very old Ayurvedic and Tibb system of medicine in India dating from prehistory. They were telling how ginger is effective in treating both osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis but especially, rheumatoid arthritis. They gave a few cases of success in so doing. Its effectiveness in treating these two types of arthritis was said to be due to its anti-inflammatory effect.

"I assumed that the nerve ending spasms I was having were caused by an inflammatory reaction. I began taking a heaping teaspoon per day of ground ginger bought in a food market. I mixed it in a glass of milk and in almost no time it abolished this problem

that had plagued me for over 60 years. This problem has remained abolished now for over 10 years and I take my ginger almost every day.

"It is not all that easy to understand but I will try to explain the antiinflammatory action of ginger. We get a fatty acid in meat called arachidonic acid. Adult humans can make a little of it but not much. It plays a major role in arthritic pain that is caused by inflammatory action. It is acted on by two enzymes, the first one is cyclooxygenase. It converts arachidonic acid into several of what are called 2 series prostaglandins. One is a pain prostaglandin, another is involved in an inflammatory reaction. Aspirin inhibits cyclooxygenase and hence pain. Insofar as the cyclooxygenase produce prostaglandins, it is both anti-inflammatory and anti-pain.

"The other enzyme acting on arachidonic acid is lipoxygenase and it converts arachidonic acid to the super inflammatory 4 series leukotrienes. Aspirin will not inhibit lipoxygenase. As it tends to prevent arachidonic acid from flowing into the cyclooxygenase produced prostaglandins, more of it will tend to flow into the highly inflammatory leukotrienes. As a result aspirin is often proinflammatory and with some asthma patients, it will cause an asthma attack.

"Ginger is said to inhibit both cyclooxygenase and lipoxygenase so it may be truly anti-inflammatory. The name of the game in any antiinflammatory treatment is to inhibit lipoxygenase.

"The cost of a teaspoon a day of ginger is next to nothing, and unlike aspirin it seems to have no harmful side effects. Here it is suggested that patients suffering from either osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis may care to try ginger. Rheumatoid arthritis is caused by our immune cells attacking our joints, however in so doing, they cause the pain and joint destruction by an inflammatory action. It could be that patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis may be in for a pleasant surprise if they would try ginger

"In your article an arthritic patient was quoted as saying that evening primrose oil was of no benefit. Gamma linolenic acid in evening primrose oil acts to prevent arachidonic acid from being acted on by both cyclooxygenase and lipoxygenase and as such should be antiinflammatory. It also inhibits lipoxygenase. It is likely that to have any benefit in treating arthritic pain, one would have to take about five capsules a day.

"Vegetarians get almost no arachidonic in diet. I have never heard any suggestion that vegetarians suffer less arthritic pain but if looked into, there might be something to this line of thought.

"It is my thought that ginger added to milk improves the flavor of milk. I hope that some patients suffering from arthritic pain may read this letter, try ginger and report back to me."

"Essential Fatty Acids (EFA)" chart reproduced in the following pages, helps to clarify the relationship between foods we eat, and inflammatory response. [Arthritis: Osteoarthritis and Rheumatoid Diseases, Anthony di Fabio, Gus J. Prosch, Jr., M.D., available through this foundation.]

In a letter to us dated November 3, 2000, Wayne Martin adds:

"Here is something of interest. Beginning in 1972 there have been five big expensive trials on aspirin in treating Coronary Heart Disease. The first four showed no benefit in the reduction of death from Coronary Heart Disease. It was only the last one here in the USA -- The "Physician's Health Study" that showed benefit -- and not all that much even so. In this last trial Bufferin™ was used and it contains aspirin and some magnesium.

"There was a letter in the *New England Journal of Medicine*

about ten years ago with comment on the failure of the aspirin trials. It was said that aspirin reduces thromboxane A₂ which is good but that it also reduces prostacyclin.

“Ginger like aspirin inhibits cyclooxygenase which reduces thromboxane which is good, however ginger unlike aspirin induces rather than inhibits prostacyclin. Ginger may be far more effective in the prevention of Coronary Heart Disease than aspirin.

“The reference to this is *Medical Hypothesis* 1986 Volume 20, pp 271-278, Bockon.”