

The Nutrition Reporter™

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EXTRA

The independent newsletter that reports vitamin, mineral, and food therapies

Coping with Terrorism as Part of Daily Life

One day – September 11, 2001 – changed the lives of Americans and many other people, at least for the foreseeable future. We saw, over and over again, the horrifying videos of passenger jets turned into human missiles, destroying buildings and thousands of lives. Within weeks, another threat emerged – that of anthrax mailed through the Postal Service. It's more than likely that we'll soon be seeing still other bizarre and perverted attacks – acts of the criminally insane in the 21st century.

First, allow me to reassure you about the mailings of *The Nutrition Reporter*. Our mailings are by people we know, trust, and see on a regular basis. We have no reason to believe our mailings are anything but safe when delivered to the post office.

Second, it is clear that everyone is now responsible for exercising extra vigilance as they go about their everyday lives. Although paranoia is not justified, it behooves everyone to report people or things that "don't look right" to the police.

Third, this is a time to also pay extra attention to our individual health. The November issue of *The Nutrition Reporter* (mailed with this one) describes recent studies that found the B-vitamin inositol beneficial in reducing panic disorder, as well as the herbs kava and valerian in reducing stress and anxiety. The inositol study builds on earlier research showing that this vitamin can also ease depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder and, in a more general way, extends research demonstrating the stress-protective effects of the B-complex vitamins.

Bioterrorism, and the spectre of chemical warfare, are supreme justifications for using nutritional supplements to enhance our immune systems. After all, it is usually immune-weak people who succumb to life-threatening infections. White blood cells, T cells, B cells, and the many other components of immunity depend on an adequate supply of many nutrients, which are often shortchanged in a diet built around highly processed fast and convenient foods.

My favorite immune-boosting supplements are backed by solid research. They include

- N-acetylcysteine (NAC), 500-1,200 mg daily; which greatly reduce flu symptoms.
- Dimethylglycine (DMG), 200-1,000 mg daily, which the U.S. army found increased survival among anthrax-infected guinea pigs;
- Vitamin C, 2,000 mg or more daily, which can reduce symptoms of many infections;
- Vitamin E, 400 IU daily, which enhances the responsiveness of the immune system;
- Zinc, 25 mg daily, which Los Alamos National Laboratory researchers found increases resistance to alkylating agents, such as mustard gas;
- Selenium, 200 mcg daily, which boosts immune function and prevents dangerous mutations in flu and other viruses;
- Cruciferous vegetables and garlic, which enhance the body's ability to break down hazardous chemicals.

Of course, none of these supplements or foods is "bullet proof" and you should not expect them to fully protect you against any potential biological or chemical threat. However, one or more of them can likely give you a fighting chance by improving your resistance, reducing symptoms, and hastening your recovery against a broad range of insults. — *Jack Challem*

Perspectives...

Supplements that Give Supplements a Bad Name

I can't keep track of the many supplements people pitch to me hoping that I'll write about them in *The Nutrition Reporter* or a health magazine. Some products are good and inspired by excellent scientific research. Others are imitations of successful products, and some have very dubious origins.

But one product recently stood out – not for its remarkable health benefits, but because it risks making everyone in the supplement industry look

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sleazy. Similar products from other companies have also appeared in the marketplace.

All of these products unabashedly promise to increase the size of women's breasts. They are, in effect, the herbal version of falsies. The message: if you take this pill, you will become buxom and popular, and all your breast-related insecurities will disappear.

Assuming that it does what the ads claim, the product is at the very least frivolous and offensive. At the worst, it might be dangerous.

In discussing these products, Tori Hudson, N.D., of Portland, Ore., who specializes in women's health issues, told me, "This is truly quackery. This kind of product begs consumers to make a distinction between quack products and something that's going to help them."

Not long ago, one of these companies mailed me a booklet that looked a lot like many of the popular health guides. It described how the herbal product could enlarge and firm up a woman's breasts without the hassle or danger of breast-implant surgery.

The booklet even included testimonials from unnamed women who developed "perky" breasts after taking the supplement. And on the last page of the booklet, an ad gave me the number to call to order "the natural way to a more beautiful bust."

The rationale behind the product is that its eight herbs can "balance" a woman's own hormones and lead to, if you'll excuse me, an uplifting experience.

The author, who claims to be an herbalist, tells the story of how she discovered this herbal combination. She happened to recommend a bunch of medicinal herbs to help an infertile woman. After taking the herbs, the woman's breasts increased from an A- to C-size cup in less than three months (and the change was not because the woman had become pregnant).

It was then, apparently, that the herbalist realized she was on to something. She described how she, her husband, and friends formed a company to promote this product with an all-too-obvious name that rhymes with robust. They have not, however, conducted any scientific studies.

What's perplexing is that, normally, the phytoestrogens (natural estrogen-like compounds in plants) block the potent and often undesirable effects of real hormonal estrogen. Phytoestrogens do this by attaching to the cells' estrogen receptors and preventing the hormone from stimulating the cell.

If you're a woman taking these natural estrogens, you've probably noticed a reduction of estrogen-related symptoms. These plant hormones can ease premenstrual discomfort (e.g., swollen and

tender breasts) and reduce menopausal hot flashes.

But what about an herbal product that inflates breast size – much like estrogen would?

Something's wrong here. Breasts tend to swell before a menstrual period or when a woman is pregnant. Women tell me it's not a great feeling. The question becomes: Do you really want to walk around all the time feeling like you're pregnant or your period is about to come?

These herbal products are very different from other phytoestrogens. "In my clinical experience, I have not seen enlargement or tenderness of breasts in women taking phytoestrogens," Hudson explained.

So, what might be causing the swelling? Some of it may be related to water retention, which estrogen promotes. Or it may be related to an increase in breast fat, because estrogen promotes fat development. In addition, estrogen promotes the growth of cells in size and number, and the implications of that should be troubling in itself.

There are other issues here as well.

Let's assume that this product is completely safe. Then it merely preys on women who feel insecure about their bodies because they happen to have small or sagging breasts. The simple fact is that no one can buy self-esteem in a pill.

Ethical companies and retailers should steer away from a dubious product that exploits a woman's feelings of insecurity. Selling breast-enlarging supplements brings down everyone in the health and natural foods industry a notch or two.

And for women, my advice is simple: avoid these products and learn to appreciate your body – reveling in its strengths and accepting its weaknesses – and encourage everyone you know to do the same.

As Hudson said to me, "All sizes and shapes (of breasts) are normal."

The simple truth is something you've heard many times before. Your body is a temple. Treat it with respect. Change what you can, accept what you cannot. — JC

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