

## 5-HTP, omega-3 fatty acids hold promise

(continued from page 2)

Sahelian notes that while clinical experience with 5-HTP is limited, "in general, most physicians have noted that 5-HTP plays a positive role in disorders related to mood, anxiety, appetite, and sleep." Because the nutrient's effects have not yet been fully explored, he recommends giving it for no longer than three months at a time, and skipping one or two days a week.

### Omega-3 fatty acids

In September 1998, the National Institutes of Health held a workshop to examine preliminary findings indicating that omega-3 fatty acids may be an effective treatment for a wide range of disorders including depression, hyperactivity, and schizophrenia.

Omega-3 fatty acids cannot be produced by the body, but are found in fish, leafy green vegetables, nuts, and flaxseed and canola oils. While early humans ate a diet high in omega-3

fatty acids, most people now eat a diet low in omega-3 fatty acids and high in omega-6 fatty acids (found in corn, soybean, cottonseed, safflower, and sunflower oils).

Omega-3 fatty acids are critical components of synaptic membranes in the brain, and an increasing body of research links deficiencies of these fatty acids to cognitive, behavioral, and emotional problems. Researchers at the NIH workshop, for instance, noted that the rate of depression in Japan (where people eat an average of over 140 pounds of omega-3-rich fish per year) is only 0.12 percent, while the rate of depression in Germany (where people eat an average of just over 20 pounds of fish per year) is 5 percent.

Among other research reviewed at the NIH workshop:

- When Andrew Stoll et al. gave fish oil supplements to patients suffering from bipolar disorder, the subjects improved so dramatically that the researchers terminated the study five months earlier than planned. Nine of 14 patients taking the fish oil capsules responded positively, the researchers report, compared to only three of 16 taking a placebo.

- Rhian Wyn Edwards reported that depressed patients have significantly lower levels of the omega-3 fatty acid DHA and its precursor EPA in red blood cell membranes than do non-depressed control subjects.

- L. J. Stevens and colleagues measured levels of omega-3 fatty acids in boys between the ages of 6 and 12. They report that "a greater number of behavior problems, assessed by the Conners' Rating Scale, temper tantrums, and sleep problems were reported

in subjects with lower total omega-3 fatty acid concentrations." In a separate study, Stevens and colleagues found that children with ADHD had significantly lower concentrations of key fatty acids in their blood than other children.

- Malcolm Peet and colleagues found that chronic schizophrenics have reduced levels of essential fatty acids in red blood cell membranes, and that omega-3 supplements significantly reduced their symptoms.

Researchers stressed that their findings are preliminary, but Jerry Cott, NIH chief of adult psychopharmacological research, said, "I don't know of any other preventive treatments for

mental disorders. This is in a class by itself. It is extremely promising."

In related research, P. Willatts and associates reported evidence that infants receiving formulas not supplemented with essential

fatty acids score significantly lower on tests assessing IQ-related skills than do infants receiving supplemented formulas. The researchers speculate that supplementation with key fatty acids "may be important for the development of childhood intelligence."

**Editor's Note: ARI would like to hear from parents and professionals using 5-HTP and/or omega-3 fatty acid supplements as treatments for autism.**

"Dietary fat may play role in psychiatric illness," Anna Nidecker, *Clinical Psychiatry News*, November 1998.

—and—

"Effect of long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids in infant formula on problem solving at 10 months of age," P. Willatts, J. S. Forsyth, M. K. DiModugno, S. Varma, and M. Colvin, *The Lancet*, Vol. 352, No. 9129, Aug. 29, 1998, pp. 688-691. Address: P. Willatts, Dept. of Psychology, University of Dundee, U.K.

—and—

"Omega-3 fatty acids in boys with behavior, learning, and health problems," L. J. Stevens, S. S. Zentall, M. L. Abate, T. Kuczek, and J. R. Burgess, conference abstract, 1995. Address: L. J. Stevens, Dept. of Foods and Nutrition, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1264.

—and—

"Essential fatty acid metabolism in boys with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder," L. J. Stevens, S. S. Zentall, J. L. Deck, M. L. Abate, B. A. Watkins, S. R. Lipp, and J. R. Burgess, *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Vol. 62, No. 4, October 1995, pp. 761-768. (See address above.)

—and—

"Fish oil may relieve psychiatric symptoms," Reuters, September 7, 1998.

—and—

"Can an ancient diet improve our modern psyche?" John Fauber, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 29, 1998.

—and—

*5-HTP: Nature's Serotonin Solution*, Ray Sahelian, Avery Publishing Group, 1998.

## LETTER

### *Autism and tetanus*

To the Editor:

The ARI 12/3 article "Does tetanus play a role in autism?" [re research by Ellen Bolte] raises a number of questions. The one that I would most like to ask is, how could our children's intestinal tracts become infected with tetanus? It is unlikely that the majority of our children with late-onset autism would have come into contact with anything sharp or infected with tetanus, and, even if they had, the symptoms would be different. If Ms. Bolte's hypothesis is correct, and, in our son's case, I believe it is, then it seems to me that the only way these children could have contracted a sub-acute, chronic tetanus infection is from the very injection that is designed to protect them from full-blown tetanus.

Our son's autism followed closely on the heels of a DT vaccination at the age of two years. From the time of his immunization his whole system was affected—fever, chronic diarrhea, shingles, anorexia, gradual loss of speech, staring spells, complex partial seizures, and the emergence of autistic behaviors. I know that his brain was damaged by this vaccination, for what else could have caused the regression in speech and emergence of seizures in the absence of a neurological insult? And why has he improved, as many other children have, with alternative therapies like homeopathic remedies, vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, and secretin? Is it because post-vaccination toxins have been removed from their bodies and their immune systems are boosted?

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**Editor's Note: The possibility that tetanus vaccine may cause serious adverse reactions has not yet received the careful scrutiny that it deserves.**

Our Editor's Note on page 7 in ARI 12/4, on "Autism and Digestion," led to some confusion. While both the Pepcid discussed in 11/3 and the HCl-pepsin discussed in 12/4 were reported to improve behavior in autistic children, and while both Pepcid and HCl-pepsin are digestive aids, their physical effects are opposite. HCl-pepsin increases stomach acidity, while Pepcid (famotidine) decreases stomach acidity.