



AGEING WELL

maintaining quality of life

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Living a longer and healthier life:

Part 3; human growth hormone (hGH)

by Associate Professor Zeinab Khalil

In previous issues of Ageing Well, we introduced you to two of the most talked about "anti-ageing" medicines, vitamin E and a hormone known as dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA). In this issue, we will continue our series by introducing another hormone known as human growth hormone, hGH. This is a hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary gland and is normally put out in a pulsatile fashion during sleep, 15 minutes every night. This hormone is needed throughout life to maintain physical and mental wellbeing. It peaks after adolescence and declines steadily with age.

A number of benefits have been attributed to this hormone including; increased muscle and bone mass, decreased stomach fat, increased immunity and improved function of the heart and kidneys. Because of this, hGH was thought of as the premier hormone for regeneration and rejuvenation.

Some researchers claim that hGH removes skin wrinkling, reduces sagging cheeks, reverses the degeneration of nerve function and increases sexual vitality. But because we don't know all the long-term side effects, unmonitored

supplementation with hGH (unless there is a proven deficiency), could pose health problems. Human growth hormone is very difficult to obtain because a gross deficiency in its production must be shown before it can be legally acquired for therapeutic purposes. In Australia, use of hGH is currently restricted to children of short stature. Side effects sometimes observed in those children when taking hGH include fluid retention, pain in the joints and, occasionally, carpal tunnel syndrome (pressure on the wrist nerves) and pseudotumour cerebri (pressure in the head).

So until we know more about possible side effects, instead of rushing to hGH supplementation, it is worthwhile considering the natural ways of boosting your body's production of hGH. A high protein diet obtained from vegetarian sources such as soybeans, almonds, cashews, oat flakes, rolled oats, lentils, cottage cheese and spinach could provide the essential nutrients for optimal hGH production. A healthy diet therefore, combined with simple exercise will help you in maintaining hGH levels which will improve vitality and help you to "age well".



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Education

Assessment and Care Planning:

Training Program for Aged & Disability Assessment Staff in HACC Services

**10-11 September, 2001
NARI, Parkville**

A two-day training program is being held for aged and disability assessment staff in Home and Community Care (HACC). The program outline includes: processes for supporting individual needs; use of assessment tools: assessment of risk; targeting approaches and priority of access guidelines; informed decision making including duty of care and laws of negligence; organisational procedures, systems and practice for care planning; developing and documenting a care management plan; inter professional collaboration.

For further details or to register your interest, contact Joan Nankervis or Melissa Lindeman at NARI on (03) 8387 2148 (j.nankervis@nari.unimelb.edu.au or m.lindeman@nari.unimelb.edu.au)

A Message from the Interim Director...



The Board of Management of NARI is very close to appointing a new Director. As I mentioned in the previous issue, this will be a joint appointment between NARI, Melbourne Health, and The University of Melbourne to appoint a Professor/Director of NARI, of Aged Care Program Melbourne Health and a Professorial Fellow within The University of Melbourne. I am confident that our new director will be proud to be the leader of NARI and its creative, highly motivated and committed staff and students who strive conscientiously to achieve NARI's short and long term goals - to help people age well.

Upon the arrival of our new Director, I will continue in my usual role as Director of the Biomedical Research Division at NARI. Managing the biomedical research team, setting up new initiatives in the research effort and developing new research ideas will hopefully lead to new discoveries, initiating new national and international collaborations. I will also continue my academic role with The University of Melbourne in teaching and supervising students.

In the meantime while we are awaiting the exciting announcement of our new Director, our commitment to raising NARI's profile in ageing research continues. Together with the Centre for Education and Research on Ageing (CERA), NARI is leading a National consortium conducting a Scoping Study on Ageing Research. This study is commissioned by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to inform the Australian research agenda.

The Scoping Study aims to help the NHMRC Working Committee for Research on Ageing optimally direct the investment of limited research resources. It also aims to assist the Committee to make the case for additional funds in the area of ageing research. The Scoping Study will provide an overview of key research findings and outcomes of research into ageing – both in Australia and internationally. The study will identify “markers of ageing” that measure wellness and frailty better than age in calendar years and identify strategic directions for future research on ageing, with an emphasis on those areas that would help develop policy and practice of health services delivery in Australia.

We should all remember that ageing research can potentially enhance the health and well-being of older people at an individual and a population level and can facilitate cost-effective health care delivery. Ageing research can indeed help achieve the United Nations targets set during the International Year of Older Persons: “dignity, independence, participation, self fulfillment and quality care for older people.”

Associate Professor Zeinab Khalil
Interim Director

National Falls Prevention Forum

A recent visit to Australia by one of the most published falls prevention researchers in the world – Mary Tinetti from the United States - triggered the running of the first National Falls Prevention Forum in Sydney in May. NARI's Keith Hill was part of the Victorian Reference Group on Preventing Falls for Older People that organised the two-day forum. Support for the forum was provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, NSW Health, and the Department of Human Services (Aged Care), Victoria.

The forum attracted 220 registrants from all over Australia. In addition to a presentation and panel discussion involving Mary Tinetti, topics covered on the first day included the perceptions older people have about falls and falls prevention, falls prevention as part of the Enhanced Primary Care package, and an outline of background and development of the NSW Health falls prevention policy. The second day's activities included sessions on falls risk assessment, referral systems, program evaluation, falls clinics, and innovative practice sessions for project staff to provide snapshots of components of their projects. A number of other NARI and MECRS staff attended, and Keith Hill and Freda Vrantisidis of NARI, and Jenny Schwarz from MECRS were invited speakers at this very successful forum.



Dr Keith Hill and Mary Tinetti at the National Falls Prevention Forum

YES! *I would like to help ensure more people are "ageing well".*

Please accept my gift of:

\$25 \$50 \$100 \$200

my choice \$ _____

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible

Name and address (for receipt)

Title: Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss _____

First Name _____

Surname _____

Org. (if applies) _____

Address _____

State _____ P'code _____

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Date of Birth ____/____/____

I enclose a cheque*

OR please debit my

Diners Bankcard Visa

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for the total amount of \$ _____

Card Number

Expiry Date: ____/____

Signature: _____

* payable to Ageing Well Foundation

Further information overleaf

Please return to:

National Ageing Research Institute

PO Box 31

PARKVILLE VIC 3052

AUSTRALIA

thank you

YES! *I would like to know more about "ageing well".*

Please send me more information on:

- Becoming a NARI Volunteer
- Memory, pain, falls and wound clinics
- Current Research Projects
- Bequests and memorial gifts
- Sponsorship
- Education

Please help us get to know you:

How did you hear about NARI and the Ageing Well Foundation?

What are your main areas of interest?

- Ageing in general
- Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease
- Pain management
- Falls, balance, mobility
- Research (biological, clinical and public health)
- Education
- Other area(s) _____

Why are you interested in NARI and the Ageing Well Foundation?

- Self
- Family member
- Professional interest
- General interest

What age group do you belong to?

- under 30
- 31 - 40
- 41 - 50
- 51 - 60
- 61 - 70
- 71 - 80
- 81 - 90
- over 90

Other comments about NARI or feedback about *Ageing Well* newsletter:

Avoiding the Tumble

Avoiding the Tumble is one of two separate collaborative falls prevention projects between NARI and hospital settings recently funded by the Department of Human Service (Acute Health). Avoiding the Tumble is a three-year project aiming to reduce falls among patients in the acute and sub-acute settings of the Western Health Service (comprising Western, Sunshine, and Williamstown Hospitals). The project manager, Kathryn Bailey at Western Hospital, will lead the inter-disciplinary team, which includes NARI staff Keith Hill, Robyn Smith, Deborah Osborne and Kirsten Black. A key innovative aspect of this project is the recruitment and development of four Falls Consultants, who will receive extensive training in all aspects of falls prevention, and will be available to assist hospital staff with assessment and management plans for patients with more complex presentation across Western Health Service. This will only be one component of a multiple risk factor approach to falls prevention. Other project activities include general staff education and research and evaluation studies.

The second project involves a twelve month program to reduce falls at Melbourne Extended Care and Rehabilitation Service (MECRS). Keith Hill is project manager for this project, with Freda Vratsidis the project officer. This project will build on a short duration project conducted jointly between NARI and MECRS last year, and involves a strong, experienced team of clinicians from MECRS, together with the NARI team. Key components of this project include research validating the falls risk assessment tool developed in the previous project, a continuation of the successful Expo staff training program, additional training for key ward staff, patient and carer education sessions, action research in hospital areas not previously involved, ongoing environmental audits, and formal evaluation of newly purchased bed alarms.

The integration of the strong research base of the NARI team with experienced hospital clinical staff is a key feature of both projects. This approach should result not only in achievement of the projects' goals of reducing falls and related injuries among older people in hospitals, but also in a substantial contribution to the evidence base in this relatively under-researched area.

MORE RESEARCH AND NEWS →

Turn over page

Getting to know...



Dr Paul Andrews

Dr Paul Andrews has been involved with NARI since 1988 in various capacities including Senior Research Officer, Research Fellow, and presently as the Manager of Information Technology. Dr Andrews is also a Senior Fellow with the University of Melbourne, Department of Medicine at Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Paul completed a PhD in the Biology Research laboratory and developed many of the techniques still used in today's research. After his PhD he went on to complete a Graduate Diploma in Computer Science and is now responsible for all IT aspects of NARI's activities.

"People often ask me why I changed careers and left science for computing. I reply that when I was doing my research computers were not as common as they are today but once I got my hands on one I found I had a talent for making them work - the decision was quite easy after that. Having said that however, I have maintained my links with the research at NARI and in many ways I have not left science at all, I have just changed the way I am involved with it".

Paul also works with NARI's Education Division where he has been involved in the development of interactive multimedia for students and other health care professionals. His strong background in the area of medical research coupled with his knowledge of computer technology enables him to produce first class, interactive computer programs.

At home Paul and his wife Arna (who also has a PhD) spend a lot of time chasing their son and twin daughters around. "There's never a dull moment in my life!"

NARI and Medical Teaching

For many years now, NARI has played an integral role in the education of students in their fourth year of medicine at The University of Melbourne. Students are allocated two weeks at NARI for an intensive program of geriatric medicine, which includes lectures, bedside teaching and visits to residential care facilities. The success of this teaching program is in large part due to the generous input provided by clinicians from institutions affiliated with NARI, particularly MECRS. More than 30 clinicians contribute to the teaching of the students, and the residential care facilities and the Alzheimer's Association provide educational opportunities. The Office of the Public Advocate also contributes to the varied program, as do some NARI volunteers who take part in the "Other Side of the Coin" talk in which students have the opportunity to hear what it is like to be ageing well.

2001 is the final year for the program in its current format. The University of Melbourne is updating the medical course to a format in which Problem-Based Learning, rather than lecture-based learning, is the principal approach. NARI has made a substantial contribution to the development of a new medical curriculum at The University of Melbourne, which brings an exciting and innovative approach to medical teaching.

NARI's Education Division will play a vital role in this new medical training, being responsible for co-ordinating key components of the teaching program for students in their second, fifth and sixth years of the course.

For more information about studying medicine at The University of Melbourne and NARI's role in teaching, please contact Dr Peteris Darzins or Robyn Sloan at NARI's Education Division (ph 03 8387 2148).



Mrs Elizabeth Brown, Dr Peteris Darzins and student Jason participating in the 'Other Side of the Coin' session.

PROSTATE

All men in Australia should visit their doctor whenever they have problems with urination.

There are three main categories of prostate problems;

- Prostate enlargement called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)
- Inflammation (prostatitis)
- Prostate cancer.

Regular checks of the prostate are recommended for all men over the age of 50.

Early detection of cancer improves the chances of successful treatment and a cure. In the early stages, cancer in the prostate gland does not usually produce any symptoms. It may be found during a routine examination. Symptoms are caused by the prostate growing and narrowing the urethra.

Tell-tale signs include;

- Difficulty in starting urine flow
- A slow interrupted flow and dribbling afterwards
- Frequent passing of urine
- Blood in the urine
- Pain during urination

Any man noticing these problems should discuss them with his doctor. For more information about prostate cancer, ask your doctor.

Australasian Prostate Health Council and the Australian Cancer Society

Volunteering Opportunities



Penny Amy testing one of her volunteers

Changes to cognitive (thinking) processes in normal, healthy ageing.

Normal healthy ageing is associated with changes in cognitive function such as increased forgetfulness and slower thinking processes. Defining normal age-related changes in cognition is essential for early identification of abnormal changes. We are currently studying the effects of healthy ageing on the ability to switch rapidly between different cognitive activities. We need right-handed volunteers, aged 65+ with normal or corrected to normal vision, and no known neurological conditions. Participants will be asked to complete a few short questionnaires and simple tasks (e.g. naming pictures and reading words presented on a computer screen). For further inquiries please call Penny Amy on (03) 8387 2148.

Upcoming Events...

2001 Volunteer Function

Just a reminder to all our volunteers that this year's Annual Thank You Volunteer Function, which is proudly sponsored by Croft Health Care, is coming up soon. It is scheduled for International Volunteers Day, on the 5th December 2001. So be sure to mark it in your diaries. Stay tuned for further details!

Health Information Day

NARI will be involved in a Health Information Day, to be held at Melbourne Extended Care and Rehabilitation Service on Wednesday November 14th 11.00am - 3.00pm. An extensive program of activities / information will be available. All welcome. For further information, please contact Maria Virgona on (03) 8387 2200.

Thank you...

Thank you to all donors for continuing to support research into the causes and consequences of ageing. We rely on the involvement of individuals and corporations to invest in our future. We would like to thank everyone who has contributed during the last few months and acknowledge the following major contributions; Mr Les Gordon, Dr Evert Vos, Mrs Elizabeth Brown, Mrs Julia Mary Simpson, Dr Margaret Henderson, Ms Val Barrett, Mr Russell Fynmore AO, Bendigo Old Peoples Welfare Society, Mr Alan Castleman, Mr Ross Barker, JB Were & Son Charitable Fund, Mr W.E Mayell, Mrs Sandi Croft and Mrs Jancis Reed and so many other generous donors.