

Health & Well-being

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Dr Gill's Blog



Have you ever thought that walnuts look like tiny brains? Perhaps that is only the sort of thought a doctor has when looking at a snack!

A recent study from the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston showed that these clever little walnuts influence our appetite and may be valuable in reducing weight.

Using functioning MRI (fMRI) researchers showed that the area of the brain that regulates hunger and cravings, the right insula, was stimulated by consuming walnuts. This allowed the snacker to resist unhealthy foods. This is the first time that a direct neurocognitive impact has ever been demonstrated. The study looked at 10 obese individuals who lived in the Center for two five day periods which allowed the team to measure their food intake very accurately. During those periods they were given smoothies that either did or did not contain 48 grams of walnuts (the amount recommended by the American Diabetes Association (ADA) in their dietary guidelines). The smoothies were flavoured to taste exactly the same and the study was double blind. The subjects were then scanned whilst being shown pictures of different types of food. Those who ate walnuts showed more activity in the right insula and also reported feeling less hungry and experiencing fewer cravings. So they could lose weight.

A small handful of walnuts now goes into my daily smoothie!

That handful of walnuts I add to my food has a range of other really important benefits. A small number of these clever little nuts provide me with more than 100% of the daily recommended amount of plant based Omega 3 fats, along with plentiful copper, magnesium, molybdenum and biotin.



In other tests four hours after eating walnuts, blood tests show a significant improvement in cholesterol levels so regular consumption can be part of a regime to protect your heart and blood vessels. They are also rich in antioxidants. The Omega 3 content has been linked to a reduction in depression and improvement in cognitive function. Studies have also shown a

significant reduction in the risk of type 2 diabetes in people who eat walnuts regularly and of course they are also packed with fibre.

They are said to have a good effect on hair because of their vitamin B7 (Biotin) content which can help to strengthen hair and reduce hair loss.

The information on reduction in cravings is robust and the nutritional value of walnuts is very well documented. Whether in fact they reduce hair loss is less well proven but there is more than enough evidence to say that they should form part of healthy and varied diet and I am convinced enough by what I have seen to put a small handful into my smoothies. Rightly or wrongly, I do believe I have noticed that they have reduced my appetite during the mornings and I get through to lunch time more easily without anything else to eat. Or am I nuts.....

Looking after your Lifestyle

Good night?

With summer firmly behind us, the nights drawing in and the colder air we feel, can have a significant impact on our sleep cycle. Daylight impacts the pituitary which produces melatonin and helps regulate the body's sleep cycles which, if lacking, will impact our quality of sleep.

Diet also plays a part in this seasonal shift with many opting for more rich, fatty and sugary foods. This dietary change can also see a decrease in levels of our leptin hormone and it is this 'satiety hormone' made by adipose cells that helps regulate energy balance by inhibiting hunger. This also increases the level of the hunger-signalling hormone ghrelin. Reduced quality sleep impacts these levels and can increase our appetite, leading to weight gain.

Stress is also a key factor which can impact our quality of sleep. If you don't sleep enough at night, your body will boost its level of stress hormones, leaving you feeling more stressed the next day and you may find it even harder to fall asleep in the evening. A continuous cycle will start to



So what can you do?

- Practice a relaxing sleep routine – dim the lighting, read a book instead of your phone to cut out blue light emissions, make sure your room is a comfortable temperature, minimise external noise.
- Exercise – as little as 10 minutes of exercise a day can improve the quality of your sleep. Moderate exercise in the day can increase your sleep duration and sleep quality, it also helps to reduce stress and anxiety by producing endorphins.
- Unwind by listening to guided sleep meditation to help you into a more

develop and leave you feeling exhausted and unable to focus. It also puts you at risk of developing high blood pressure, heart disease, gastrointestinal issues such as IBS and also can lead to dental issues owing to grinding/clenching teeth when you do manage to get some sleep.



relaxed state which will assist sleep and lower stress levels.

- Keep a regular bed time routine; getting into and out of bed at around the same time each day will help programme your body into knowing that it's time to fall asleep.
- Lavender is a natural relaxant, try putting some lavender oil on your pillow to help you fall asleep.

If your lack of sleep is persistent or affecting you on a regular basis, do make an appointment to see your GP who can recommend best method of support and/or treatment.

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Doctors Corner

Dear Doctor,

A colleague at work recently reports being bitten by a tick in the countryside. I was quite surprised when she mentioned being tested for Lyme's Disease which sounded quite alarming

What is Lyme's Disease?



Lyme disease, or Lyme borreliosis, is a bacterial infection spread to humans by infected ticks.

Ticks are tiny spider-like creatures found in woodland and heath areas. They feed on the blood of birds and mammals, including humans.

Ticks that carry the bacteria responsible for Lyme disease are found throughout the UK and in other parts of Europe and North America. Lyme disease can often be treated effectively if it's detected early on.

What symptoms should I be aware of if I were to be bitten?

Early symptoms:

Many people with early-stage Lyme disease develop a distinctive circular rash at the site of the tick bite, usually around three to 30 days after being bitten. This is known as erythema migrans.

The rash is often described as looking like a bull's-eye on a dart board. The affected area of skin will be red and the edges may feel slightly raised. The size of the rash can vary significantly and it may expand over several days or weeks. Some people with Lyme disease also experience flu-like symptoms in the early stages, such as:



Tiredness (fatigue), muscle pain, joint pain, headaches, a high temperature (fever), chills and neck stiffness.

Late symptoms:

More serious symptoms may develop several weeks, months or even years later if Lyme disease is left untreated or is not treated early on. These can include: pain and swelling in the joints, problems affecting the nervous system, heart problems, inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

Some of these problems will get better slowly with treatment, although they can persist if treatment is started late.

A few people with Lyme disease can develop long-term symptoms similar to those of fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome. This is known as post-infectious Lyme disease. It's not clear why this happens, but likely to be related to over activity of one's immune system rather than persistent infection.

Can it be treated?

Testing and Treatment:

Blood tests can be carried out to confirm the diagnosis after a few weeks, but these can be negative in the early stages of the infection. You may need to be re-tested if Lyme disease is still suspected after a negative test result. Long lasting symptoms will require specialist advice.

Treatment involves a course of antibiotics which could be between 2-4 weeks. There's currently no clear consensus on the best treatment for post-infectious Lyme disease because the underlying cause is not yet clear. Be wary of websites offering alternative diagnostic tests and treatments that may not be supported by scientific evidence.

Prevention:

There is currently no vaccine available to prevent Lyme disease. The best way to prevent the condition is to be aware of the risks when you visit areas where ticks are found and to take

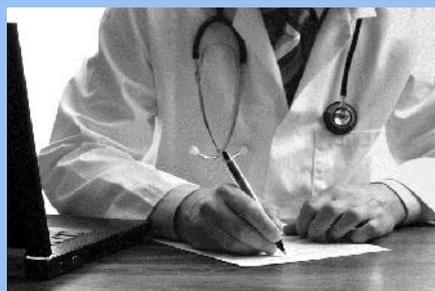
sensible precautions.

You can reduce the risk of infection by:

- Keeping to footpaths and avoiding long grass when out walking
- Wearing light-coloured fabrics that may help you spot a tick on your clothes
- Inspecting your skin for ticks, particularly at the end of the day, including head, neck and skin folds (armpits, groin and waistband) - Remove any ticks you find promptly
- Wearing appropriate clothing in tick-infested areas (a long-sleeved skirt and trousers tucked into your socks)
- Using insect repellent on exposed skin
- Checking your children's head and neck areas, including their scalp
- Making sure ticks are not brought home on your clothes
- Checking that pets do not bring ticks into your home on their fur

If you are travelling to a woodland or heath areas in the UK, North America or Europe please talk to your doctor about the risk of tick bites. Late spring, early summer and autumn are common time of the year for tick bites, because these are the times of year when most people take part in outdoor activities, such as hiking and camping.

This months Doctor's Corner was provided by Roodlane GP & Clinical Lead for Travel Health and Vaccines, Dr Reval Sukkhu



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