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A VRM, Inc. Publication

January 2013



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Bold Predictions for Natural Product Research in 2013

By Michael T. Murray, ND



The natural product marketplace is often affected by major headlines and news stories highlighting research. Most often this research is negative, but occasionally it is positive. Before I get to my top five predictions, I want to say that over the years I have been amazed to see the media disseminate questionable results from research studies in major medical journals held up as “proof” that the public is being duped into spending money on worthless natural products. On the flip side, I have been even more amazed at times when a product of questionable benefit is promoted on a daily television show or news program as the latest major breakthrough based upon very limited and potentially extremely biased research.

That being said, here are my top five predictions for 2013.

1. More Negative Studies on Single Ingredients

One of the major shortcomings of research into nutrition and natural products is the focus on the effect of just one nutrient. Unfortunately, nutrients are not drugs—they work as *part* of a system. Taking one nutrient at the expense of another creates imbalance and that can lead to disease. Furthermore, taking one “limited” antioxidant at high dosages leads to

greater oxidative damage. By “limited” I am referring to the fact that most nutrient antioxidants such as vitamin C and E, and beta-carotene exert antioxidant effects against only a small spectrum of pro-oxidants and free radicals in contrast to the broader activity that many flavonoid and phytochemicals provide.

There are countless examples of this misguided research over the years that has cast a shadow over vitamin E, beta-carotene, folic acid and, the latest, calcium supplementation. I have no doubt that once again the industry will be rocked by another example in 2013. My guess is that calcium will be the focus simply because there are so many studies to which researchers can refer to create a story.

A whole generation of women has been focusing on calcium supplementation to prevent osteoporosis, not realizing that bone is dynamic living tissue that requires a wide range of nutrients and dietary strategies. The relatively recent finding in one study that calcium alone without supportive nutrients might increase the risk of having a heart attack is not surprising to me at all. In fact, I predicted it and warned against it in 1982. Was I clairvoyant? Hardly. It is just common sense. It is well known that taking too much calcium can lead to significant reduced absorption of important heart-protective minerals like magne-

sium, zinc, copper and selenium. The negative effect on magnesium levels alone may be the key explanation for the results of the study. Another consideration are those with low vitamin K levels taking calcium, as vitamin K is somewhat preventative against calcium being deposited in the arteries.

2. Vitamin D's Star Power Will Shine Even Brighter

Here is the easiest prediction that I could possibly make. There is going to be a lot more positive noise in the media from new research on vitamin D. What makes this prediction so likely to be true is the sheer number of researchers that have jumped on the vitamin D research bandwagon. It is an exciting field of study that is still ripe for uncovering additional health roles and mechanisms for vitamin D. A quick search at the U.S. government's website, www.clinicaltrials.gov, provides an extremely high number of past and current studies of vitamin D that should publish results in 2013. Some of these studies are bound to grab headlines.

3. Is Magnesium the New Calcium?

Magnesium is second only to potassium in terms of concentration within the individual cells of the body. The functions of magnesium primarily revolve around its ability to activate

many enzymes. Magnesium insufficiency is extremely common. Consider that the average daily intake of magnesium is estimated to be about 150 mg for most Americans, yet our requirements are roughly 350 mg per day, and it is clear to see why there are so many conditions that are responsive to magnesium.

Research over the years has shown that magnesium can be quite useful in a long list of health conditions, both as a preventative and treatment. Yet, despite this research, magnesium has always played second fiddle to calcium. I think 2013 is the year that more people wake up to the importance of including magnesium in their daily supplement plan. My prediction on what will be the tipping point to the overwhelming cumulative body of research is the publication of another study highlighting magnesium's importance in preventing heart disease and other complications of diabetes.

4. Advanced Forms of Curcumin Will Catapult Curcumin Sales

Curcumin has been the subject of more than 5,000 preclinical studies. What research has continually documented is that curcumin is highly pleiotropic, meaning it exerts multiple actions. Foremost is curcumin's ability to fight inflammation at many critical steps. However, while many preliminary studies in test tubes and animals show curcumin has great promise, a major issue limiting its use in humans has been that it is not very well absorbed.

To address this issue, several types of curcumin products have been designed to more effectively raise blood and tissue levels of curcumin. Clinical research on two of these advanced forms, Meriva and Theracurmin, have ignited tremendous excitement in the scientific community. The reason being is that researchers now have curcumin formulations available that allow them to achieve concentrations in body tissues that mirror those used in the preclinical studies. Currently there are more than a dozen clinical trials in process with Theracurmin with several slated to have results published by 2013. An important study with Meriva is also to be published. My prediction is that the publication of these studies will lead to even greater sales of curcumin products in 2013.

5. The Next Superfood Will Be ...?

I would like to believe that celery will be the "it" superfood in 2013. Celery contains 3-n-butylphthalide (3nB), a compound responsible for the characteristic odor of celery as well as tremendous health benefits. A new study on the benefits of a celery seed extract standardized to contain 85 percent examining its ability to help lower blood pressure is due to be published in 2013. I expect the results to be very positive. Hopefully, this study will help get the word out on this valuable superfood extract. **VR**



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