

Buying into B12 myths

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Pitcher Roger Clemens is feeling the heat. A former trainer has said he injected the seven-time Cy Young winner with steroids and human growth hormone, but Clemens says the only injections he received were of vitamin B12 and lidocaine, an analgesic.

Lidocaine is sometimes injected into joints to dull joint pain -- a potential problem for an aging athlete -- but B12 injections are more commonly used to treat pernicious anemia and address diet deficiencies in the elderly. Physicians generally believe that the well-nourished rank-and-file don't need it, but the vitamin hasn't lost its luster among those who say it boosts energy.

Vitamin B12 is an essential vitamin found primarily in animal foods. The body uses it in the formation of DNA and red blood cells, and it's necessary for the healthy functioning of the nervous system. For people who are deficient or at risk of deficiency, injections can be helpful. For a well-nourished pitcher hoping to improve his fastball, not so much.

"Some athletes believe that vitamin B12 injections will increase oxygen (supply to the muscles) and that that enhances performance," says Andrea Giancoli, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association. "But in the absence of a vitamin B12 deficiency, the studies don't support that."

Aside from a 1989 report in the International Journal for Vitamin and Nutrition Research, which found that a combination of B1 (thiamin), B6 (pyridoxine) and B12 (cyanocobalamin) improved fine motor skill in target shooting, the evidence is scant, writes Thomas Brenna, professor of human nutrition at Cornell University, in an e-mail.

And B12 injections are not going to give the average person an energy boost, says Dr. David Baron, chief of staff at Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center and Orthopaedic Hospital.

"For my entire career, I have encountered patients who have requested B12 shots, and I've been explaining to them that they serve no useful purpose," Baron says. "Honestly, this is an argument that's been going on between Western scientific physicians and complementary and alternative health-care providers for many, many years."

Some weight-loss programs even recommend B12 injections, says James Hill, director of the human nutrition center at the University of Colorado. "But there's no indication that they're doing any good," he says.

When the body is drenched with B12, the kidneys will filter out whatever isn't needed, says Dr. Michael Karp, an internist and assistant professor of clinical medicine at USC School of Medicine. The upside is that too much B12 probably won't hurt you, he says.

The basis for the belief that vitamin B12 shots can provide energy goes back decades, Baron says. "Before we knew how to manufacture B12 in an injectable form, people who were deficient for various reasons were quite ill," he says. Once physicians began giving B12 shots to this population, "people who were horribly chronically anemic from B12 deficiency just basically came to life," he says. "It was a miracle."

The average person needs 2.4 micrograms of B12 per day, and most people get sufficient amounts in their food, particularly given how many foods -- such as cereals, nondairy milk, meat substitutes and protein bars -- are fortified with B12, Giancoli says.

To be sure, a deficiency of B12 can have serious consequences -- including pernicious anemia and nerve damage. "The nerve damage can start with memory problems, declined cognitive function, tingling in the extremities and can progress," Giancoli says. "And the neurological changes may not be apparent in everyone. There may be very general symptoms, like fatigue, weakness, weight loss, constipation, loss of appetite."

People most at risk for B12 deficiency are patients with certain types of gastrointestinal disorders (such as Crohn's disease), vegans and the elderly. The elderly are at risk for a number of reasons, says Dr. Marie Bernard, a spokeswoman for the American Geriatrics Society.

"As you get older, you're more likely to have accumulated medical problems that might prevent you from absorbing B12 optimally," Bernard says. Those events would include surgery to remove part of the intestine and use of certain medications, such as acid-suppressing drugs.

As for that other segment clamoring for injections -- the worried well who believe the shots boost energy -- B12 also might have a benefit of sorts: a nice little placebo effect.

"Quite frankly," Karp says, "I'll sometimes get a new patient who says that they're getting a monthly vitamin B12 injection and that it makes them feel better, so I'll continue to give it to them. If it makes them feel better, that's still something."

Vitamin B1 use the past mainly for prevention of vitamin B1 deficiency, commonly used in the treatment of insomnia and fatigue, because vitamin B1 can regulate autonomic function and reduce the excitability of the cerebral cortex, the promotion of sleep and anti-fatigue effect. In addition, it is also used lead poisoning prevention and treatment of vitamin B1, three times a day, each 30 mg, with a clear Lead effect.

Experts believe: Lead role of vitamin B1 by vitamin B1 or its metabolite formation of complexes and lead the promotion of lead emission. And all drugs, the use of Vitamin B1 also pay attention to issues. Following the seven inappropriate is the oral vitamin B1 in need attention.

Not served before eating

After dinner taking vitamin B1 conducive to their absorption. Water-soluble vitamin B1 is because, after taking fasting will be rapid Xishouruxie, prior to use in humans, such as excreted by the kidneys, so that drugs can not fully play their role.

It is not appropriate and aminophylline (alkaline substances) Combination

Vitamin B1 in the alkaline environment of instability, and will soon be decomposed so that the destruction of drug and reduce or failure.

Should not be combined with aspirin

Aspirin for acid hydrolysis in the stomach. Vitamin B1 can reduce gastric pH value to aspirin increased the stimulation of gastric mucosa. Therefore the two can not be taken at the same time.

Should not be combined with medicinal carbon

Vitamin B1 carbon adsorption may be reduced medicinal effect. If the merger application must be first oral vitamin B1, 2 to 3 hours after drug use charcoal.

Not with the use of oral contraceptives and

Oral contraceptives can accelerate the metabolism of vitamin B1, vitamin B1 reduce the concentration in the blood. Long-term oral contraceptives should be appropriate supplementary vitamin B1, vitamin B1 deficiency to prevent.

Tannins and not with the combination of proprietary Chinese medicines

Four Seasons Tablets proprietary Chinese medicines, Polygonum cuspidatum extract tablets, red tablets compound Thousand Days, cold tablets, such as Qili San containing tannin, and vitamin B1 can be a combination of precipitation, so that it can not easily be absorbed and used, and can degenerate and vitamin B1 lowering effect.

Not drinking

Alcohol can damage the gastrointestinal mucosa, intestinal mucosa hamper operation function, reduce the absorption of vitamin B1.

About the Author

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