

Niacin (Vitamin B3) Part 1: Dr. Abram Hoffer--Hero or Heretic?

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Niacin, or Vitamin B3, has been misunderstood and under-appreciated since its discovery in the 1930's. This two part article will review its history and science. While niacin is currently used to lower triglycerides, it has several additional benefits which can help with many chronic diseases that plague our global health and economy.

Abram Hoffer M.D., Ph.D.

Any discussion of niacin must begin with the contribution made by Dr. Abram Hoffer, a highly credentialed psychiatrist who lived for 90 years, taking 3000 mg of niacin per day, while the RDA remains at 13 mg. Eye-opening interviews with him can be found on YouTube. In the 1950's, Dr. Hoffer cured hundreds of cases of schizophrenia, while today it remains incurable. When his paper was published in 1957, he thought he would be declared a hero; instead he was characterized as a heretic.

In the 1940's and 50's, William Kaufman M.D. PhD. helped hundreds of arthritic patients with higher doses of niacin. Bill W., the founder of AA, included niacin in his program for alcoholism.

Recently, the AARP, the New York Times, and the New England Journal of Medicine announced that niacin's risks often outweigh its benefits and is not worthy of further study. However, the research cited is not applicable to the general population--the subjects were cardiac patients already on statins and other medications as well. Dr. Hoffer's last book, Niacin, the Real Story presents his experience, the science, and why most of have only heard marginal or negative accounts of niacin (greed!)

Niacin and Pellagra

In the early 1900's more than 100,000 people died of pellagra, a disease characterized by four D's: diarrhea, dermatitis (rashes), dementia (psychosis), and death. Joseph Goldberger M.D. who had helped determine the infectious causes of yellow fever and typhus turned his attention to pellagra. As early as the 1920's he concluded that the cause of pellagra was not infectious, as most believed, but a deficiency of niacin. His findings were not accepted until 1942 when the US government ordered fortification of grains with niacin. Within two years, pellagra was eradicated in the US and Europe. Canada did not accept this truth and continued to experience pellagra for years until it began fortifying its foods. The history of medicine and science repeats this pattern of rejection of important discoveries, with untold suffering until the truth becomes insuppressible.

What caused pellagra was that corn has to be cooked in an alkali solution to release its niacin. This process, called nixtamalization, was developed as early as 1500 BC by the Aztecs and Mayans. Corn was becoming a dominant staple in the US, Canada and Europe, but as per "modern advances", was not being processed the traditional way.

Forms of Niacin

Niacin has several forms: niacin, niacinamide and several "flush-free" forms. Each form has certain benefits

and risks, including flushing, lowering of triglycerides, cost, and toxicity. Most fortified foods such as breakfast cereals, grains, as well as vitamin supplements contain niacinamide which is safe and cheap in the amounts added. However these levels will not achieve the benefits discussed above.

Why Can't Foods Supply What We Need?

This question not only applies to niacin, but other known deficiencies including vitamin A (causing blindness in Africa), vitamin D (contributing to osteoporosis and other diseases), magnesium, iron, zinc, iodine, and omega 3 oils. Modern foods, even organic, are grown on depleted soils and processed using non-traditional techniques that fail to release nutrients or deactivate anti-nutrients. Furthermore, the RDA's for preventing deficiency disease, set in the 1950's, are not the same as those for promoting optimum function. It is the difference between surviving and thriving. "Normal" levels in the diet and blood may have little meaning if the norms are based on an unhealthy, depleted, pharmaceutically "managed" population.

For example, while the RDA for vitamin D remains at 400 IU per day for an adult, and will prevent rickets, most experts suggest that levels of 4000 IU or more are necessary for optimal health. Over 50 years ago, two-time Nobel Laureate Linus Pauling concluded that we need at least 2000 mg of vitamin C per day (some need much more!) for optimal health, while the RDA remains about 100 mg. Regarding niacin, while the RDA of 13 mg will prevent pellagra, Hoffer concluded that our advanced brains and bodies need higher doses, just like a Corvette needs a higher octane fuel just to run normally.

How Does Niacin Work?

Niacin is used by every cell of the body to generate energy and do its job. Niacin is intimately involved with the amino acid tryptophan, as well as 5HTP, serotonin, melatonin, and the B complex vitamins, which have critical roles functioning of brain, liver, immune, sleep and mood. These details, as well as recommendations on how to use niacin will be discussed in Part 2 of this article.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

1. **This educational material may not be used to influence medical care without supervision by a licensed practitioner.**
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3. Dr. Cheikin's website has related articles and references such as "Anti-Nutrients", "Seeing the Obvious" and others.

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Proven Benefits of Niacin
Lowering of triglycerides
Raising of HDL cholesterol
Lowering of total and LDL cholesterol
Improvement in osteoarthritis
Curing of schizophrenia
Help with alcohol and addiction
Possible Additional Benefits
Healing of gums
Improved skin, hair and nails
Improved anxiety
Lower blood pressure
Improved energy
Improved sleep
Improved immune function (infections and cancer)
Reduction of allergy and anaphylaxis