A "WONDROUS" VITAMIN FOR TREATING NEUROPATHIC PAIN AND PREVENTING DEGENERATIVE DISEASE

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One of the more challenging issues a health practitioner often faces is that of neuropathic pain, whether related to diabetes, an outbreak of shingles – even sciatic pain. Just over a year ago a client with severe post-herpetic (after-shingles) neuropathy came to see me. This was in the middle of winter, and her pain was so severe she was wearing flip-flops and sundresses because she couldn't tolerate even the slightest touch against her legs or feet.

Unable to get relief from standard pharmaceutical protocol, she was desperate. After a few failed attempts to bring any significant relief using some of the herbs that have been found a bit helpful for this kind of pain, I went back to the drawing board. It was then that I learned about benfotiamine, a fat-soluble form of thiamine, or vitamin B1, being used with remarkable results in cases of this tough, stubborn pain.

Benfotiamine was developed in Japan in the late 1950's to treat alcoholic neuropathy, sciatica, and other painful nerve conditions. It was patented in the U.S. in 1962, and has been in widespread use in Japan since 1962 and in Europe since 1992 with encouraging results.

Benfotiamine works in a remarkable way, by preventing a degenerative process known as glycation – the binding of sugars to protein. A good way to understand the kind of damage glycation does is by thinking of how the skin of a chicken or turkey looks after it has been roasted. The crinkly, sort of gluey characteristics are a good example of the effect of glycation. Wrinkled skin is yet another example, and more disturbing, age-related glycation end products (AGEs) are involved in the formation of the sticky, beta-amyloid plaque that forms in the brains of those afflicted with Alzheimer's disease. In diabetics, the complicating health issues of retinopathy, neuropathy, and kidney damage are the direct result of glycation; high levels of glucose coursing through the bloodstream over the nerves, kidneys, and retinae (check out *Life Extension Magazine* December 2006 issue – "The Deadly Connection Between Diabetes and Alzheimer's Disease" by Edward R. Rosick, DO, MPH, DABHM).

Unfortunately, while we have been able to address inflammation and free-radical damage with the use of anti-oxidants, glycation is a "sticky" aging issue that has been much harder to address. The only other nutrient I know of that does this is carnosine, and unless 1000 mg are religiously taken daily, it is of no use. It is also expensive.

I knew it couldn't hurt to recommend this supplement to my client, and so I did. I told her not to expect anything for six weeks but that she might experience some relief in as short a time as a few days. To our great delight, it was only a matter of days when things began to turn around. Several weeks later, as spring was arriving, she rode on the back of

her husband's motorcycle into the White Mountains. Her pain was not completely eradicated, but the improvement was dramatic, to say the least.

I have since had opportunity to recommend benfotiamine to others suffering from nerve-related pain with good success. In fact, just this week a gentleman who has been a client for some time dropped by to pick up some products. He happened to mention that in recent days he had been experiencing some annoying pain down the outside of his right thigh – not terrible, but irksome. Hmm… why not? I threw enough capsules into a bag for him to try for a week or ten days. That was at about 10:00 in the morning, and around 2:00 the same day he gave me a call. Amazed, he reported that he had taken two capsules as soon as he got home, and the pain was completely gone.

One final word, regular water-soluble thiamine does not work in the same way as lipid-soluble benfotiamine. No matter how much thiamine you take, your plasma levels do not materially increase beyond what you get from the first 12 milligrams of the dose. And then getting thiamine into the cells to do its job is just as tricky. Intrigued? For more information about benfotiamine, check out www.benfotiamine.org.