

Health

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LIVER DISORDER A NATURAL REMEDY



Ciara Patras of Holmdel, 16, (left) was born with a liver disorder. Her mother, Ruth (right), helped treat it with kombucha, a fermented tea. The drink is believed to boost the immune system. DOUG HOOD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

LABOR OF LOVE

Mother uses tea to stabilize daughter's condition

By Susan Bloom :: For NJ Press Media

Born in 1995, Ciara Patras was a beautiful, happy baby ... but by 6 weeks old, her mother could tell something was wrong.

"I noticed that her eyes were yellow, like she had jaundice, and it wasn't getting better," said Ruth Patras, 52, of Holmdel.

Two weeks and several visits to Riverview Medical Center in Red Bank and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia later, doctors confirmed that Ciara had no bile drainage from her liver into her intestines, and diagnosed her with a disorder known as biliary atresia.

According to the National Institutes of Health, biliary atresia is a congenital condition resulting from a blockage in the ducts that carry bile from the liver to the gallbladder. As the bile ducts help to both remove waste from the liver and carry salts that enable the small intestine to digest fat, their blockage can cause liver damage or lead to potentially fatal cirrhosis.

Doctors told Patras that her daughter would likely require a liver transplant by the age of 3.

"I can't describe the pain and feeling of helplessness I experienced upon hearing that news," Patras said. "Ciara was so young and undeveloped for a procedure of that magnitude. Plus we learned that many times, the first transplant doesn't take, so we were doubly concerned that she'd need to go through the whole ordeal again."

Patras was no stranger to the devastation caused by serious illness.

"We had a lot of cancer in our family, so before Ciara was born, I tried to rewrite my own DNA in an effort to reduce my risk," she said.

She saw some information on kombucha, a fermented tea purported to enhance the immune system, and began drinking it to boost her own health and wellness after Ciara's birth. But given Ciara's compromised situation, Ruth began considering the possibilities of administering kombucha to her infant as well.

Typical of many babies born with biliary atresia, doctors confirmed that Ciara would need a Kasai procedure, or surgery to connect her liver directly to her small intestine to circumvent the blocked bile ducts, a move necessary to get her to age 3 and the probability of a liver transplant.

"They told me that the chances of Ciara's Kasai procedure being successful would be enhanced if her immune system was strong, so I started giving her kombucha at 9 weeks ... and her operation succeeded," Patras said. "I'll never know if that would have happened on its own, but I just kept giving her kombucha after that, and she tolerated it."

"Over the next few weeks, all her bloodwork showed that her liver was improving and, after six months, tests revealed it had stabilized," she said.

What's in kombucha?

Kombucha is a fermented beverage created by the synthesis of tea, sugar and water. Though there is limited documentation on its medicinal benefits, kombucha is reported to have detoxification and energizing properties and its use dates back thousands of years.

"Kombucha is one of those things you either love or hate, but it's hugely popular and one of the best-selling items in



After her daughter's successful experience with the tea, Patras created her own brew, which is sold in several stores. DOUG HOOD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

our refrigerated section," said Heather Surman, health consultant at Nature's Corner Natural Market in Spring Lake. "As a function of the fermentation process, it has beneficial enzymes and acids which can boost immunity and energy, reduce the load on the pancreas and liver, and aid in digestion."

Spreading the word

Her own daughter's health enhanced by kombucha, Patras didn't stop there. She took to the Internet, located seven other children suffering from biliary atresia across the nation, spoke with their parents and got the kids started on kombucha.

"Though each child was in a different stage of the disorder, every kid had a marked improvement after they started drinking it," Ruth confirmed.

She has since spoken about her experience with the tea at an National Institutes of Health conference and took her passion to a new level in 2009, when she began brewing her own brand, aptly named "Ciara's Great Tasting Kombucha," for retail sale.

"As Ciara started high school, I wanted to ensure that she would have a good supply of high-quality kombucha available to her when she went off to college," Patras explained.

She teamed up with sister-in-law Marianne to launch the business, which brews out of a facility in Toms River.

"I worked very hard on our kombucha recipe, tweaking the fermentation process, the amount of sugar and water, the temperature and the flavors to get the maximum taste, purity and potency," she said.

Whole Foods picked up her brand in its North Atlantic and Northeast stores; local Kings and Fairway supermarkets are soon to follow. As noted on the bottles, a portion of the proceeds from every sale are donated to biliary atresia research at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

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People's Pharmacy

By Joe Graedon & Teresa Graedon

Trouble with treating Meniere's disease

Q. I have been diagnosed with Meniere's disease.

This causes dizzy spells that come out of nowhere and are totally disabling.

They last from 30 minutes to four hours.

I saw a specialist who prescribed a diuretic.

Unfortunately, the medication itself makes me feel rather dizzy. I tried reducing the dose to half a tablet, but the next day I had two episodes, one complete with nausea and vomiting.

I tried taking it at bedtime, and that was better, but still very uncomfortable.

At this point I'm afraid to drive. When I go out, I have to hold onto my husband's arm due to the light-headedness from the medication.

Any suggestions you may have would be most appreciated.

A. Ear specialists believe that Meniere's disease is caused by an imbalance in the fluid of the inner ear.

Symptoms include episodes of spinning dizziness lasting longer than 15 minutes accompanied by decreased hearing, pressure and ringing in the ear.

Such attacks come and go.

Treatment usually involves a low-salt diet and the diuretic Dyazide (triamterene plus hydrochlorothiazide).

Ask your physician if an even lower dose might be worth trying.

When this approach is not helpful, some specialists recommend corticosteroids.

They can be given orally or injected through the eardrum. When all else fails, there is a surgical procedure that may help eliminate the condition.

We conducted a one-hour radio interview with specialist Dr. David Kaylie about dizziness and various kinds of balance disorders.

Anyone who would like a CD of this program may send \$9.99 plus \$2 postage and handling to: Graedon's People's Pharmacy, Dept. CD-816, P.O. Box 52027, Durham, NC 27717-2027.

Q. My insurance company wants to switch my Lovaza prescription to fenofibrate. What do you think of this change?

A. Lovaza is a prescription-strength highly purified form of fish oil used to lower high triglycerides.

Fenofibrate is a completely different type of cholesterol-lowering medication.

Only your doctor should decide if fenofibrate would be an appropriate substitute for you.

Q. Many years ago, I developed a terrible Clostridium difficile infection in my gut from antibiotic treatment for chlamydia. Vancomycin did not cure the C. diff, which was painful.

My elderly gastroenterologist remembered that it used to be common to give people "flora restoration" for this condition, washing out the harmful bacteria by enema and replacing it with flora taken from a healthy individual. A nurse friend of mine organized such a transfer. My pain disappeared completely.

At that time, I corresponded with Dr. Thomas Borody, a gastroenterologist in Sydney, and he now provides the transfer treatment there. I understand that the Swedes never dropped this form of treatment.

A. C. diff infections are becoming harder and harder to treat. When antibiotics wipe out good bacteria in the digestive tract, C. diff often takes over. It can cause serious or even life-threatening diarrhea.

A recent article in the journal Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology (online, Aug. 25, 2011) described fecal microbiota transplant as "safe, inexpensive, and effective." By reintroducing normal intestinal bacteria, the balance can be re-established.

COGNITIVE FUNCTION SALT'S EFFECTS



High salt, low exercise bad for brain

By Janice Lloyd :: USA TODAY

Research has shown consuming too much salt and being inactive leads to heart disease, but now a new study shows the same combination also can be bad for brain health.

Canadian researchers studied the salt intake and physical activity levels of 1,262 healthy men and women ages 67 to 84 over three years and found those with the highest levels of sodium (3,091 milligrams a day and greater) and the lowest levels of exercise tended to show poorer cognitive performance than those with a low sodium intake and an active lifestyle.

The findings were published last month in the journal Neurobiology of Aging.

"These findings are important because they help people know they can be proactive in retaining healthy brains as they age," said Carol Greenwood, one of the study's lead researchers and a professor at the Baycrest Center for Geriatric Care at the

University of Toronto. "Baby boomers especially need to know that sitting on the couch watching television for long periods of time and eating salty snacks is not good for them."

Four million to 5 million adults in the U.S. have some form of dementia, and those numbers are expected to soar as baby boomers grow older. Among other findings: Sedentary older adults showed no cognitive decline over the three years if they had low sodium intake.

One teaspoon of salt is equal to 2,000 milligrams. In the study, low and medium sodium intake were defined as not exceeding 2,263 and 3,090 milligrams respectively.