Lyprinol – big impact on asthma

Ian Wishart profiles a new scientific study on NZ’s mussel extract

Medical science continues to make the most of Lyprinol, the extract from New Zealand’s green-lipped mussel: the first got the world talking a decade or two back.

Now sold around the world as either Lyprinol or “OmegaXL” – a reference to its high potency omega fish oil content – the patented extract is back in the news after a major new study showed its impact on asthma.

A US research team, led by Dr Timothy Mickleborough, wanted to know whether lyprinol could influence asthma attacks among high performance athletes. They ran a sample through a randomised double-blind trial, some of whom received lyprinol, some who stayed on their normal diet and a third group who were unknowingly given a placebo instead of lyprinol.

In that way, the team hoped to test the ‘placebo effect’ as well, where people report feeling healthier simply because they are taking something.

What they found was dramatic – a big reduction in asthma attacks but only amongst the group on lyprinol.

“Obviously with asthma the impact is very, very big. We looked at exercise-induced asthma and we saw around a 57% improvement in lung function after the airway challenge,” Mickleborough told Investigate.

“The good thing about this is that it potentially could reduce medication usage, particularly for asthmatic athletes.”

In fact, the study showed just how big that impact was, with athletes on the lyprinol test using their bronchodilators an average of 1.6 times a day, compared with 9.8 times a day for those not taking lyprinol.

“A lot of medications have side effects,” says Mickleborough, “particularly inhaled corticosteroids which asthmatics often take to control their airway inflammation. So when you see these guys with asthma puffers, we’ve shown that it reduces the need to use those, and that’s big.”

Mickleborough says a danger of relying on medications is that they can become less effective over time.

“The more you use those puffers, the more you build up a tolerance to them, and that’s not good.”

But if lyprinol is having such a dramatic effect on asthmatic athletes, could it also enhance the performance of ordinary athletes?

“Does it improve lung function in your non-asthmatic athlete? We don’t know that yet,” he says. “That’s a study I’m going to be kicking off in October.”

If lyprinol is found to be performance enhancing for athletes generally, it’s unlikely to become a restricted substance because it is simply a concentrated food ingredient – Omega 3 – present in varying degrees in a range of natural foods. It’s a nutrient crucial for humans.

The Mickleborough study follows hard on the heels of another published last year in the Journal of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology. That study, conducted by a University of Auckland team, found lyprinol supplements reduced the number and severity of asthma attacks in children.

Lyprinol, of course, is already recognised in the medical literature as an anti-inflammatory and anti-arthritis product.

With this country’s central role in producing antibacterial Manuka honey, the green-lipped mussel and of course pineapple lumps, it looks like our reputation as ‘Godzone’ isn’t far wrong.

References:
1. The Internet Journal of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology. 2012 Volume 8 Number 1. DOI: 10.5580/2b7aa