

# The FELIX Letter

No. 62

A COMMENTARY ON NUTRITION

1991

## AN AMAZING TALE ABOUT SKIN

A California subscriber, R. Alvarez, gave me permission to tell his story, sent to me in the form of this letter, which I've edited only slightly.

I have had dyshidrotic eczema for the past 48 years, not continually, but on and off.

*[Dyshidrotic eczema is also known as pompholyx. The MERCK MANUAL, 15th edition, 1987, describes it as "a chronic condition characterized by deep-seated itchy vesicles on the palms, sides of the fingers, and soles. Scaling, redness, and oozing often follow the vesiculation... Though no cause is known in most cases, a primary cause, such as a fungus or a contact allergen, should always be sought.]*

Periodically I broke out in raised 2-3 mm size sores, which contained a clear, slightly sticky liquid. These sores would cover the fingers of both my hands. At any given time all my fingers would be covered with sores; at other times only a few fingers would be involved. These outbreaks would last from a few days to a few years.

Throughout the years I have been to many doctors and hospitals to try and get help for my eczema, but I never did get much help.

I won't go into lengthy details on treatment but it was the usual, such as triamcinolone ointment [a cortisone preparation], etc. Years ago I even had one doctor treat me with X-rays. I would put my hands under the X-ray machine and "cook" my fingers. I had about 9 or 10 such treatments. If I don't get cancer at some time in my life it will be a miracle.

The last outbreak of sores on my fingers lasted from 1986 to 1990. I had sores continually, on one or more fingers.

### A Glimmer of Hope

I had been getting your newsletter for some time, and I also read the book THE OMEGA-3 PHENOMENON [by Donald O. Rudin, M.D. & Clara Felix, Rawson Assoc./Macmillan, 1987]. Finally, a light turned on in my head!

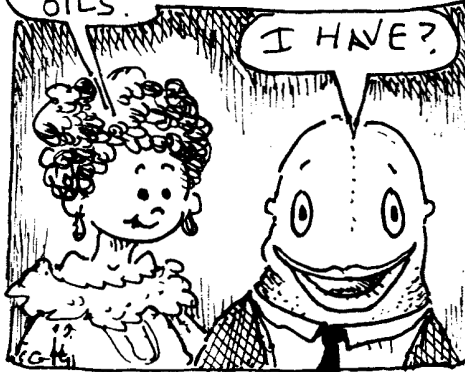
Reading about the Omega-3 oils, linseed oil to be exact, I figured there was something there for me.

Around the first part of 1990 I started taking one, sometimes two, tablespoons of organic linseed [flaxseed] oil. I took the oil ever day, straight. Of course, I should have followed a diet as you suggest in your newsletter or as outlined in the book, and also taken vitamins and minerals, etc., but I didn't.

In about 3 weeks from the time I started taking the linseed oil my fingers started to clear up. At 5 weeks, they were completely clear of sores.

It was FANTASTIC!!!!

You know, you've REALLY CHANGED SINCE YOU STARTED TAKING THE FISH OILS.



After a short time, seeing such beautiful results, I decided to test to see if it really was the linseed oil that helped clear up my eczema. (A brave researcher, Alvarez!) I stopped taking the linseed oil. It didn't take long. Within days, three new sores started to come out on the small finger of my left hand. [A few days later, sores developed on two other fingers. Two weeks from the time he stopped taking the oil, sores began developing on the fingers of his right hand.] Right away, I went back to taking the linseed oil, the same way as I had before I tried my experiment. In only a few days I could see that the new sores were starting to dry up a little. Within three weeks, maybe a little more, my fingers were again almost clear of sores.

Besides the eczema on my hands, for the past three years the tips of my fingers had been cracking and peeling and had developed a sandpaper-like texture. Well, along with clearing up the eczema, the linseed oil has also cleared up my finger tips. As of now all my fingers are as clear and smooth as a baby's bottom.

After all this time, 48 years, the numerous outbreaks of sores on my fingers, all those doctors and hospitals, etc., "CURED" with a spoonful of oil!! It's hard to believe.

### The Plot Thickens

What I'm describing next will be hard to credit or believe, but you will see it fits right in with all my other skin problems. Besides the eczema on my fingers and the cracking-peeling finger tips, I have had, again periodically and for the past 20 or so years, freckle-like spots on the biceps area of my left arm, about 2 to 3 mm in size, irregularly shaped, dark brown to black in color. Superimposed on or around these freckles, sores would develop, somewhat like those on my fingers, but different. The sores were about 3 mm in size with a dry raised center that could easily be rubbed off, leaving a red, open sore. Both the freckles and the sores would always break out together and always clear up at the same time.

The outbreaks on my fingers seemed to be independent of those on my arm. I could and would break out with sores on my fingers and not on my arm, and vice versa. (Or, both areas would break out at the same time. Sometimes one would clear up and not the other, etc.)

Here's what happened to me.

After I started taking the linseed oil in early 1990 and the eczema on my fingers was clearing up, I broke out with freckles and sores on my left bicep. The more the eczema on my fingers cleared up, the more my arm broke out in sores! I was lost!

Here I'd better explain something. At some point after I started taking the linseed oil and seeing the great results

in cleaning up the eczema on my hands, I thought I should also clean up my diet, because I felt ultimately it is/was my diet which caused all my skin problems. I cut out fats from my diet--butter, "funny fats" [*hydrogenated and trans-fatty acids*], other fats (oils), etc. I also cut out all high cholesterol foods. I started to eat more in line with your suggestions in the newsletter and the diets outlined in THE OMEGA-3 PHENOMENON. I actually started eating foods "prepared from scratch" only. As you will see, I went too far.

Still looking for answers to the outbreak on my arm I went back to your newsletters and reread THE OMEGA-3 PHENOMENON and other sources of information, but still couldn't figure it out. This went on for months. My fingers cleared up--no problems, smooth as silk--but still the sores on my arm persisted.

Going through the book yet again, it finally hit me. In the preface, page xiii, it states: "Moreover, as you will learn in this book there are two families of essential polyunsaturated fats." The answer was there, and in your newsletters, but I hadn't been able to see it!

*[Mr. Alvarez decided that perhaps the sores on his arm would respond to Omega-6 fatty acids. He began taking 2 tablespoons of safflower oil per day. Safflower oil is very high in Omega-6 linoleic acid, very low in Omega-3 alpha-linolenic acid.]*

I didn't change my diet, I still took the linseed oil in the morning, used no meats, butter, or other oils, cut out all the cholesterol foods I could, and used nothing but natural foods, meals made from scratch.

Right away, within days, I could see the freckles and sores on my arm looking different. In a little more than three weeks from the time I started safflower oil, the freckles and sores on my arm were almost gone!

Now you can see the point. After I started taking linseed oil and "modified" my diet by cutting out a little too much, I had cut out almost all the Omega-6 fatty acids. The deficiency of these fatty acids gave rise to the freckles and sores on my arm, in the same way the periodic deficiency of the Omega-3 fatty acids gave rise to the sores (eczema) on my fingers.

*[Still the intrepid experimenter, Mr. Alvarez deliberately stopped taking the safflower oil.]*

I sure wish I hadn't! In 5 days freckles and sores were starting to appear on my left arm. On the tenth day, I woke up and got a big shock: I must have had fifty sores on my left arm. I even had sores on my forearms, which had never happened before.

I went back to taking the safflower oil, 2 and sometimes 3 tablespoons per day in divided doses. This time it took much longer for the sores to clear up--something like 7 weeks before I was clear of freckles and sores.

As of now, I'm taking 1 teaspoon of linseed oil and 2 tablespoons of safflower oil, and my fingers and arm are completely clear of any sores. If anything, I can say my fingers, my hands, even my fingernails never looked better, and the same for my arm.

I can't help but wonder how the deficiencies of the Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids disrupt the metabolism to produce effects like the sores I had. Maybe, in the absence of "good" prostaglandins which the deficient diet can't produce, the "bad" prostaglandins, leukotrienes, thromboxanes, etc. are able to create inflammations like the eczema on my hands and freckles/sores on my arm. *[I couldn't have said it better myself.]*

It really gets me, that simple essential oils--something so readily available--are precursors to so much that's vital in the human system, and that our system can be so dependent on something from the outside to keep itself normal.

Well! There is my story, sorry about my bad typing but I'm just learning to type. I still want to thank you for your newsletter. Without it I never would have learned how to cure myself.

R. Alvarez, May 1991

PROSTAGLANDIN



### Complexions & Essential Fats

From diaper rash to the "heartbreak of psoriasis," skin afflictions can be a doleful burden. The diverse and mysterious paths that lead to outbreaks -- allergic reactions, emotional upsets, irritating chemicals or molds in the environment, etc. -- tend to create endless puzzlements for clinicians, as well as lots of bucks for purveyors of prescribed and over-the-counter remedies. Long before there was modern biochemistry, the connection between fats and healthy skin was a logical one people used to make. One ancient remedy consisted of slathering on lanolin from sheep's wool, while other folks with dry complexions and eczema were told to eat more fatty fish or goose fat or flaxseed oil, as well as to apply the fats and oils to their lesions.

The connection was formalized by scientists in the 1930s, when dietary deficiencies of certain fats were found to produce terrible skin (and fur) conditions in laboratory animals. The outward manifestations [of a very severe lack of Omega-6 (w6) linoleic acid and Omega-3 (w3) alpha-linolenic acid] were matched in gruesomeness by the breakdown of organs and tissues internally, leading to death. These two fatty acids--the only two the human body can't make--were from then on declared essential, just like vitamins.

Only---something funny happened on the road to good health. Nutrition literature and medical practice began omitting w3 fats from essential nutrients lists. The assumption became they were either not really essential, or so little was required no one could ever become deficient.

Some skin disorders responded when linoleic acid from corn oil or safflower oil was added to patients' diets. Those skin conditions that didn't were said to be unrelated to essential fatty acid deficiency.

Donald O. Rudin, M.D. saw a different picture in the late 1970s. Substantial amounts of w3 alpha-linolenic acid in the form of flaxseed (linseed) oil added to his patients' diets cleared up or improved stubborn, chronic skin ailments [and other chronic disorders, but that's another story!]. It bore out his theory that (1) w3 deficiencies were widespread in the U.S. even in persons who ate careful diets; and (2) true healing of skin [and other] ailments required optimal amounts of both essential fatty acids in the diet.

J. L. Burton, M.D., a British dermatologist, concurs. In his article "Dietary Fatty Acids and Inflammatory Skin Disease" [*The Lancet*, January 7, 1989] he makes this observation: "The history of dermatology is littered with the corpses of discarded dietary hypotheses, some of which still stir when prodded. The idea that some types of cutaneous inflammation can be diminished by oral fatty acid supplements has recently been exhumed and resuscitated."

In reviewing how the two essential fatty acid families interact to either provoke or subdue inflammatory conditions in the skin such as psoriasis, eczema, or acne, Dr. Burton offers the following explanations.

First of all, an optimal balance of w6 and w3 metabolites is needed in all skin cell membranes in order to properly water-proof the skin.

Secondly (very much in line with Mr. Alvarez' understanding), a deficiency or imbalance sets the stage for abnormally high concentrations of highly inflammatory prostaglandins and leukotrienes. These are found, for instance, in the lesions of psoriasis.

Thirdly, he suspects that the highly polyunsaturated members of the w6 and w3 families, which are important in all cell membranes, may modulate vital signals that govern various functions in the tissues, including the skin.

### Fish Oils To The Rescue

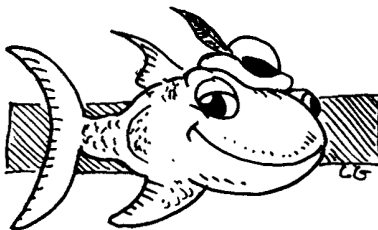
Dr. Rudin mainly used flaxseed oil, an uncommonly rich source of the primary w3 fat, alpha-linolenic acid, with his patients. If they didn't respond, he had them take fish oils as sources of the superpolyunsaturated w3's, EPA and DHA. Most of us can transform alpha-linolenic into EPA and DHA in our bodies, but some individuals (and all cats!) can't make enough and

consequently do better on fish oil, a wonderful source of ready-made EPA and DHA.

Of course, there's more to a healthy skin than making sure one's diet contains optimal amounts of w3's and w6's. \* It's just as necessary to choose foods and supplements that provide plenty of fiber, beta-carotene, vitamins A, C, and E, the B vitamins, folic acid, and RDAs of all the major and trace minerals, and as little extra fat as possible.

But, even with the best of diets, skin disorders can be tricky and unpredictable, creating as many questions as answers for dermatologists, as Dr. Burton implies in his closing paragraph:

*Clinicians who find this a confusing field may feel empathy with the following: "Day by day those who are obliged to consume their best energies in the frequently so toilsome and exhausting routine of practice find it becoming less and less possible for them, not only to closely examine, but even to understand the more recent medical works." They may take comfort in the fact that these words were written by Virchow in 1858. They might also recall the recommendations of Fox in 1877: "If eczema be present, cod-liver oil must be given freely." \* \**



\*Dr. Rudin found that many of his patients required whopping amount of w3 oils at the beginning of their therapeutic program, but most were able to taper off as their condition improved.

People on average American diets generally consume about twenty times more w6 than w3 fats, a ratio increasingly recognized as a prelude to trouble. By upping their w3 intake and reducing their w6, they can comfortably achieve something closer to a one-to-one ratio.

Here are some easy ways to safely cover essential fatty acid requirements:

• 3-1/2 oz. sockeye salmon: 1.4 grams w6; 3 grams w3  
• 1 rounded tbsp flaxmeal: 0.5 grams w6; 2 grams w3

• 2-1/2 walnuts: 4.5 grams w6; 1 gram w3  
• 2 tspns canola oil: 2 grams w6; 1 gram w3  
• 1/2 cup cooked soy beans: 3 grams w6; 0.4 grams w3

Total w6 = 11.4 grams linoleic acid

Total w3 = 7.4 grams alpha-linolenic, EPA, DHA.

Whole grains, seeds, and nuts provide additional w6 fatty acids.

Remember, requirements for w6 or w3 fats may vary a great deal among individuals, just as their requirements for vitamins differ.

WE'RE DEFINATELY GOING TO HAVE TO CUT DOWN ON YOUR IRON SUPPLEMENTS, CLAY



### SUPER-EASY LOW-BUDGET HIGH-OMEGA-3 DISHES

I depend a lot on canned salmon, buying the inexpensive pink salmon by the case when I find it on sale. The following are versatile dishes for breakfast, lunch, or dinner and will keep for a few days in the fridge.

#### Lazy Chef's Salmon Salad

- One approx. 15 oz can of salmon, bones and all. Drain off liquid. Rinse with cold water to wash away extra salt.
  - Any or all of your favorite raw veggies chopped into small chunks: e.g., tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, celery, parsley, red peppers, minced garlic, etc.
  - Chunks of leftover cooked veggies, if you have any.
  - Canola, flax, or soybean oil or mayonnaise.
  - Lemon juice, apple cider vinegar or rice vinegar.
  - Favorite seasonings.
- Mix in large bowl. Serve.  
Tastes even better next day. Makes wonderful sandwiches or takeaway salad for work or school lunches.

#### Quickie Clam-Salmon Chowder

- One can New England style clam chowder
  - Broccoli, frozen peas, or any other favorite vegetable(s).
  - One can salmon approx. 15 oz
- Cook vegetable(s) in 1 cup water till tender. Add canned clam chowder, 1/2 can salmon, additional water if needed. Heat together. Serve. (Use leftover salmon for sandwiches next day, or for eggs scrambled with salmon for breakfast.) □ □

## IS THERE LIFE AFTER SOAP?

A reader in Santa Fe, New Mexico, writes to tell me he tried the infamous No-Soap method of showering/bathing described in FL #36 (1987), and--lo and behold!-- his serum cholesterol went down. Veterinarian Robert Cane's theory is that soap and detergents remove the skin's natural protective Vitamin-D-making coating of cholesterol and fats. (From FL #36): "Cholesterol and fats to re-coat the skin have to be assembled and shipped from the liver via the bloodstream, thereby raising plasma levels of LDL-cholesterol and fats. Dr. Cane suggests that daily or twice daily soapy ablutions may keep these levels abnormally high, encouraging the accumulation of plaque in arteries! You well may ask, are we then condemned to *fester*, as in the aromatic days of old, in order to safeguard our cardiovascular plumbing? Not at all! The answer, he says, is to wash as freely as before *without using soaps or detergents....*"

I'd love to see a formal study done on this. After all, nature provides its creatures with water, but I've yet to see a Camay tree in the jungle. ●●



## A REMARKABLE ANTHOLOGY ON MENOPAUSE

*Women of the 14th Moon*, edited by Dena Taylor and Amber Coverdale Sumrall, preface by Grace Paley, is a collection of writings like no other assembled heretofore. I'm proud to say I'm in it, along with better-known, distinguished women authors, poets, and activists. The 'forbidden' subject is treated from all angles except the medical, veering from poignant to comical, doling out portions of the philosophical, the practical and the inspiring. I took part in a reading at the Gaia Bookstore in Berkeley, and the place was jam-packed, mostly with younger women who bombarded us with questions. I had no idea they had such a passionate interest in menopause!

If your local bookstores don't carry it, they can order it from The Crossing Press, P.O. Box 1048, Freedom, CA 95019. Or, you can order it yourself from Gaia Bookstore, tollfree 800-543-8431. At the same time, you may want to ask for Gaia's mail order catalog. II

## WASTE NOT, BURN NOT

Harold L. Stokes, a college chemistry and math teacher and longtime subscriber from Michigan, has been working actively to promote ways we can reduce trash and recover useful materials from it. Here is a portion of his letter to the Detroit City Council opposing use of the city's giant incinerator:

"Most people who believe in incineration start with a premise that incineration causes waste to disappear. Waste does *not* vanish when incinerated. It follows the laws of nature, i.e., matter cannot be created nor destroyed...All incinerator waste ends up as gases, fugitive emissions, ash, non-combustibles and combustible items that do not completely burn. A large percentage of the waste is transformed into water vapor and Earth warming carbon dioxide gas. In addition, because of the broad mixture of municipal waste many toxic gases are formed and released to the atmosphere when trash is incinerated, [i.e., carbon monoxide, PCB's, dioxins, mercury vapor, etc.]...The transformed waste to gas to atmosphere becomes part of the air we and wildlife breathe. Some of the gases form acid rain...The major pathway of mercury's entry into Michigan's inland lakes is from the atmosphere. Seventy percent of these lakes contain fish that have bioaccumulated so much ... methylmercury that the state has issued fish advisories...alerting children and women of child bearing age to limit their consumption of certain species and sizes of fish."

## There Are Solutions!

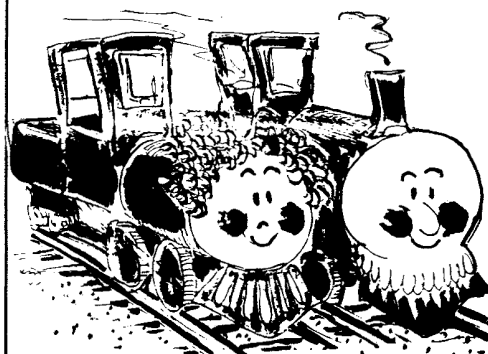
Stokes says logical and practical waste-reducing measures already are in operation in a few enlightened communities, allowing them to avoid proliferation of waste-packed landfills, as well as the capital investment and operating expense of huge incinerators. The city of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, undertook a pilot project in 1989 involving 565 residences to determine the feasibility of implementing a Wet/Dry recycling program city- and countywide. It has been outstandingly successful, becoming a model for other cities and towns.

Information and a 29-page summary of preliminary findings for Guelph's wet/dry pilot projects can be obtained from Recycling Program, City Hall, 59 Carden Street, Guelph, Ontario, Canada, N1H 3A1.

Stokes is active in War on Waste, a coalition of 40 environmental groups including Clean Water Action, Ecology Center of Ann Arbor, and Greenpeace, which is lobbying Congress to amend and improve the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. He can be reached care of Henry Ford Community College, 5101 Evergreen, Dearborn, MI 48128. ●●

## Readers and friends:

This is the tenth anniversary issue of THE FELIX LETTER, coinciding with my 70th birthday. I can't put into words how enriching, difficult, exasperating, fulfilling, and nonprofit this decade has been. Thanks to good nutrition and chocolate, I expect to keep the newsletters coming until the medical establishment cries uncle. That may require that I continue publishing in the afterlife. Thank you, each of you, for keeping me busy and out of the poolhalls. I'm working hard to keep you healthy, so don't let me down, y'hear? □□□



CLARA AND CLAY  
SAY  
GET ON BOARD  
THE FELIX TRAIN!

Illustrations are by Clay Geerdes and other artists as noted.

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