Inner Guinea Pig

Two studies consider: Can herbs and nutritional supplements quash side effects?

July 1, 2004 By Laura Whitehorn

>>1 Red-hot chili peppers

What: Skin patches using capsaicin (red chili pepper's active ingredient) to treat neuropathy pain from HIV or its meds. Mt. Sinai's David Simpson, MD, a principal investigator, says, "The patch acts on nerve fibers to limit the transmission of pain. Our initial studies show it lasts at least three months after a single one-hour application."

Who: HIVers who've had neuropathy foot pain.

Where & When: Choose from sites in 19 states through September. Call Mary-Catherine George at Mt. Sinai in New York City: 212.241.0784.

How: The first session will apply either a high- or low-dose (placebo) patch. After, you can get three more applications of the real thing, one every three months.

>>2 L-carnitine for fatigue

What: Fighting fatigue with extra L-carnitine—a naturally occurring amino acid that helps process body fats, boosting energy and your immune system. It may also subdue some HIV-med side effects. Ricardo Cruciani, MD, the study's principal investigator, says, "Antiretrovirals tend to increase excretion of carnitine," which may cause fatigue.

Who: HIVers who've ever had CD4 counts of 200 or lower (even if they're currently higher).

Where & When: Beth Israel Medical Center, New York City. Enrolling now. Call Annette Vielhaber, RN and MD, at Beth Israel: 212.844.1829.

How: Qualifiers will take special L-carnitine formulations or a placebo for two weeks; then everyone gets carnitine and answers a health questionnaire.

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