

# Popular Remedies

by Leon du Plessis

## “NZ Green-lipped mussel relieves arthritis”

By now most doctors in South Africa have probably heard of the New Zealand green-lipped mussel, which, it is claimed, can relieve pain in 60 per cent of people suffering from rheumatoid arthritis and up to 40 per cent of osteo-arthritic patients.

Mr John E Croft (47), a marine scientist and an authority on the subject, visited South Africa during May of this year to launch his 'Relief from Arthritis' book on the green-lipped mussel.

In an interview with SA FAMILY PRACTICE, Mr Croft said: "The work we have been doing in Auckland has indicated that the substance can be demonstrated to have anti-inflammatory activity in animal trials and to relieve the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis and to a lesser extent osteo-arthritis in human beings."

Mr Croft emphasised: "The substance is a food and not a drug. While it may be no more effective than the regular drug therapies in use, it is an addition to the list of available therapies and has the advantage in not indicating the classical side effects of many of the drug therapies."

"We have not yet been able to isolate the active component in the substance, or to put it another way, find the actual mechanism by which it works, but tests and studies are being made on a regular basis.

"Two major London hospitals are conducting respective double blind studies aimed at establishing (1) the efficacy of the substance and (2) if there is any clue that the substance may be better used as a first or second line treatment.

"The Auckland Hospital in New Zealand is conducting similar tests. But I can disclose the results of tests that have been done by the Glasgow Homeopathic Hospital."

Mr Croft provided SA FAMILY PRACTICE with a copy of a letter from the hospital, addressed to the editor of THE LANCET in London.

An extract reads as follows: "Rheumatoid arthritis continues to be a major cause of morbidity and loss of working days in this country.

Despite many recent additions to both the first and second line treatments, approximately two thirds of rheumatoid patients experience a progressive deterioration in health which seems not

to be reversible by standard pharmaceuticals.

Six years ago we began trials with a freeze-dried extract of Perna Canaliculus, the New Zealand green-lipped mussel. In a double trial, this material produced clinical improvement in 70 per cent of patients with rheumatoid arthritis and 40 per cent of those with osteo-arthritis.

We now have data on over 400 patients. A number of these have experienced an almost complete reversal of their clinical symptoms."

Mr Croft, a self-employed consultant in marine pharmacology and mariculture, explains in a letter to interested parties that the extract is produced by McFarlane Laboratories Ltd, Auckland, New Zealand.

He says the extract is taken from the New Zealand green-lipped mussel at a time when the gonad is ripe.

"The freeze-dried powder-form of the extract is encapsulated in hard gelatin capsules of either 230mg or 350mg net weight.

"Provided that they are kept quite dry and reasonably cool, (below 35°C), the capsules are stable for many years.

"The preparation of the extract begins with the cultivation on marine farms of the mussel. This project requires pollution-free sea

water and regular monitoring of both water and shellfish quality.

"The average growth period for the mussels on the farms is about 18 months.

"Little is known and understood of the pharmacology of this product. A significant anti-inflammatory activity can be demonstrated by the carrageenan induced oedema assay technique with rat models.

"Patient age and duration of affliction do not seem to have a bearing on the degree of benefit achieved with the product.

"Some subjects have found it necessary to continually take a daily maintenance course of one or two capsules otherwise their condition regresses quite rapidly. However most subjects seem to achieve lasting results extending to many months and even years. The naturally remissive nature of the disease makes this factor difficult to establish with present data.

"It seems that in general most subjects begin to notice a change in condition at about 21 days from starting the treatment. However there are some subjects who have needed up to 100 days on the capsules and others who have responded within the first week.

"The response is generally indicated by a slow but progressive relief from pain and increase in mobility. In some subjects a decrease in swelling, straightening of distorted fingers and disappearance of nodules has

been reported.

"None of the classical side effects associated with arthritic treatments generally have been reported. There are however effects which should be noted:

- Some subjects have indicated typical allergy symptoms sometimes quite intense in degree. Allergy to the preparation has not always been associated with an allergy to seafoods. Basically the allergy symptoms have rapidly disappeared on stopping the preparation.
  - Reports of nausea, diarrhoea, constipation and flatulence have been recorded, but only in a small percentage of subjects.
  - Exacerbation of the symptoms ranging from mild to quite serious has been recorded in some subjects. Usually the exacerbation has been temporary (a few days only) and has preceded fairly good results.
  - In line with the reasoning that shellfish preparations, due to the level of purine nitrogen present may adversely influence gout, it is not recommended that subjects prone to gout use the extract.
- Mr Croft emphasised that it was not a miracle cure, but an alternative form of treatment for arthritis.

The extract from the mussel is available in capsule form from pharmacies, health food shops and homeopaths in South Africa.

