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A 'Christmas star' will light up the sky this month for the first time in 800 years

By **AMBER RANDALL**
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL | DEC 08, 2020



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Lancet. 338(8772):899-902.

Scand J Rheumatol 2020; 49: 85-93

Changes in Laboratory Variables in Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients During a Trial of Fasting and One-year Vegetarian Diet

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We have previously reported that significant improvement may be obtained in rheumatoid arthritis patients by fasting followed by a vegetarian diet for one year. The present study was carried out to examine to what extent biochemical and immunological variables changed during the clinical trial of fasting and vegetarian diet. For the patients who were randomized to the vegetarian diet there was a significant decrease in patient events, laboratory scores, edgerness, and CRP, IgM rheumatoid factor (RF), C3 and other products, and the complement component C3 and C4 after six months of treatment. None of the assessed parameters changed significantly during the period of the group of abstention. The results of 14 of 15 measured variables favored the vegetarian compared with the abstention, but the difference was only significant for laboratory tests, IgM RF, and the complement component C3 and C4. Most of the laboratory variables declined consistently in the vegetarians who reported according to clinical variables, including a substantial reduction in inflammatory activity. The decrease was, however, decreased in the magnitude compared to the clinical results. Thus, the diet in this study could not be concluded to improve diet per se and not to the reduction in disease activity. The results of the present study are in accordance with the findings from the clinical trial, namely that dietary treatment can reduce the disease activity in some patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

Key words: rheumatoid arthritis, dietary treatment, complement, edgerness, rheumatoid factor, tumor necrosis factor- α .

The years many patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and systemic have claimed that dietary factors can influence disease activity. To study this, we have recently carried out a controlled, single-blind clinical trial on fasting and vegetarian diet in RA patients (1). Patients who switched to a vegetarian diet improved significantly in all clinical variables compared with the patients who followed an omnivorous diet. As rheumatoid arthritis is a systemic autoimmune disease the aim of the present study was to examine to what extent the clinical improvement was associated with similar changes in some biochemical and immunological parameters. Due to the lack of agreement about which of the large array of laboratory tests are best suited for monitoring inflammatory activity in RA, we have chosen analyses which cover different aspects of the inflammatory process. In addition to the routine tests we measured the following variables which have previously been studied in relation to disease activity in RA: elements of the complement system (2-5), IgM and IgA rheumatoid factor (RF) (6-8), and nuclear antibodies (9), and immunoglobulin (11), circulating immune complexes (12, 13), tumor necrosis factor- α (14-16).

Materials and Methods

Study design

Fifty-three non-smoking patients with classic or definite rheumatoid arthritis (20) were included in the study. They were randomized to either a treatment group or a control group. The first group of 25 patients were sent to a health home for four weeks. The treatment began with fasting for 7-10 days and afterwards they followed a gluten-free vegan diet which they continued at home for approximately 3 months. During the remaining study period they followed a lacto-vegetarian diet (for details see ref. 1). The control group of 28 patients were sent to a convalescence home for four weeks. They followed an omnivorous diet for the whole study period. There were 10 drop-outs in the vegetarian diet group, 3 of these were considered to be related to the treatment. The corresponding numbers for the omnivorous control group were 9 and 7 (for details see ref. 1). About two weeks after study entry and after 1, 3, 7, 10 and

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For the first time in nearly 800 years, a rare Christmas star will light up the sky at the start of this month's winter solstice, a shiny beacon that will be visible from South Florida without a telescope.

It's a planetary alignment that that last happened in the year 1226, according to Rice University [astronomer Patrick Hartigan](#).

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As they make their orbit around the sun, Jupiter and Saturn will slowly grow closer together over the next two weeks until they are almost completely aligned, [according to NASA](#).

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A star map of the night sky as seen on Dec. 21, 2020, shows the alignment of Saturn and Jupiter that will create a bright "Christmas star" on the southwest horizon. (NASA/JPL)

“Alignments between these two planets are rather rare, occurring once every 20 years or so, but this conjunction is exceptionally rare because of how close the planets will appear to one another,” said Hartigan. “You’d have to go all the way back to just before dawn on March 4, 1226, to see a closer alignment between these objects visible in the night sky.”

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When they align this closely, the two planets will appear to form a single bright star, also known as the “Christmas Star.”

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Planetary alignments aren’t all that uncommon, said Jason Matter, program director with the South Florida Amateur Astronomers Association. Jupiter and

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planets will appear to the naked eye.

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By Dec. 21, Jupiter and Saturn's orbits will be so closely aligned — less than a 10th of a degree as seen from Earth — that they will appear as one. The planets will be actually hundreds of millions of miles apart. From here, the distance between them will be about the thickness of a dime held about a foot away from your eyes.

These conjunctions happen periodically due to the way Earth,

Jupiter and Saturn orbit around the Sun, according to Matter. As all three planets orbit at different speeds, at random occasions during their orbits around the sun, the planets will appear to be close to each other.

The best time to witness this year's Christmas Star will be to look southwest as the sun sets. For the next two weeks, the planets will be closer and closer each day until Dec. 21, then will appear to swap positions and move apart. A telescope with a wide enough field of view — about 2 degrees — should be able to see both planets with some of the planets moons. Through binoculars, the event will look like a double star, Matter said.

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NASA predicts the next "great conjunction" of this magnitude won't happen for another 60 years or so, then again about 320 years after that.



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