

# ELEUTHEROCOCCUS SENTICOSUS

## *CHIPS AND BEANS PLEASE*

### FOODS FOR FITNESS

Dr Julian Jenkinson **discusses nutrition for Ironmen, discovers a wonder plant that's quite a mouthful and cries 'Bring me a shrubbery!' You'll all be Russian out for some soon**

Overtraining and frequent illness are two of the major problems associated with Ironman training. Can they be avoided without reverting to the obvious cure of reducing training and increased rest?

#### OVERTRAINING

This is when an athlete simply carries out more training than his body can cope with. The result is a drop in performance, coupled with a variety of physical and psychological problems. Examples include continual tiredness, weight loss, lack of enthusiasm, slower training times, elevated resting pulse, insomnia, inability to relax, etc.

The extent to which you become overtrained is variable. In its mild form you may be able to cure it by a couple of weeks rest. If, however, you have gone seriously over the top it could take many months off training.

Overtraining is not just something that affects the World's elite: perhaps a better word would be 'over-living'. If you are a highly stressed manager, clocking eighty hours a week at the office – one session a day could push you too far. If you are a professional athlete – four sessions a day might tip you over the edge.

#### FREQUENT ILLNESS

Fitness and health – do they really go hand in hand? Unfortunately, not always. Highly trained athletes are often more susceptible to viral and bacterial infections than their normal couch potato counterparts.

Training whilst suffering from even the most minor of viral illnesses is very tempting, but can lead to devastating effects. Having a strong immune system also has an important role to play in the prevention of illnesses brought about by over-fatigue. All athletes can fall into these fatigue

'traps' with very little warning and anything that can prevent this happening must be taken seriously.

Strenuous training increases the risk of getting ill because it puts the body under additional stress. The body reacts to stress by increasing the levels of its own stress hormone. This in turn adversely interferes with the body's immune system by decreasing levels of its own 'natural killer cells' which are responsible for attacking invading micro-organisms and virally infected cells. The result is that susceptibility to infection increases.

I'm sure, like me you've already experienced it. If someone in town has a cold, it's guaranteed that you'll get it, and it will take for ever to go!

You need to be able to increase the volume and intensity of training that your body can cope with, without reaching the point of overtraining / overliving, and also be able to recognise the onset of overtraining.

#### IS THERE A SOLUTION?

Could be. The clue's in the title, and it's not chips and beans I'm afraid. *Eleutherococcus Senticosus* (ES) is a prickly shrub which grows somewhere in Eastern Siberia and is beginning to cause a stir as an ergogenic aid (basically a go faster pill or potion). Being a cynical old triathlete, I have never been a great believer in all the 'wonder products' on the market. I guarantee that you can eat as many energy bars as you like and you'll be sick well before you beat Mark Allen. The problem is that pills, potions and energy bars are over-hyped, over-complicated and over-rated as miracle cures. So, what about this prickly shrub?

I first came across the product a couple of years ago in a magazine advert and dismissed it immediately. You can't believe anything you read in an advert, I thought.

However, it kept returning to haunt me. Research of the scientific data available on this prickly beast proved compelling reading. There were real results, not just 'Eight out of ten mothers say that their sons cycle faster after eating...'

So two years on I was forced to go back and

consult the original advert

### THE CLAIMS

ES is an adaptagen which is a substance that acts in unison with the body to maintain normality, strengthening the body's own immune system.

ES increases recovery rate allowing greater volumes and intensity of training before becoming overtrained.

Both of these points are critical to performance. It will not make you go faster overnight but it does give you more chance to fulfill your potential.

### THE EVIDENCE

I carried out my research backwards, reading the evidence then the claims and then, after a call to America, found that you could buy ES in Wales:

- Large-scale people studies noting decreased incidence of illness e.g. 13,000 Volga car plant workers in Russia and 1,000 workers at Norilsk mining works
- Many athlete studies on increased ability to train and recover - the results of these subjective studies backed up the ES claim. I was vaguely impressed, but not convinced. Apparently the reduced incidence of 'flu at the Norilsk mining and metal work plant saved them half a million roubles that year (That might be about 25 pence though!)
- Blood data the number of 'infection fighting cells' in the blood of healthy individuals was measured before and after ES use. A significant increase in the number of cells was recorded.
- Used by triathletes to improve stamina, concentration and performance

*Just what I wanted, some concrete evidence.*

### WAS ANYONE ELSE INTERESTED IN ES?

I was keen to see the findings of those who had no vested interest in the product, those with no sponsorship deals etc.

- USSR Ministry of sport recommended its use to all athletes including its Olympic teams back in 1962.
- Used to boost the immune system of cancer patients undergoing radiation therapy.
- There is presently a pilot study for its use to boost the immune system of AIDS patients. The major drug companies are trying to get FDA approval in the US (Quite a few million being spent there!)
- Used by Russian cosmonauts for training and recovery on return to earth.

- Given to victims of the Chernobyl disaster to aid recovery.
- Used by ME sufferers.

Well I hope that has provoked a bit of interest, and in years to come if ES hits the big time, I will be able to say, 'I told you so!'

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