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Miner's Miracle: Our Top Omega-3 Medical Tale

We reached back to remind our readers of a remarkable tale of a recovery ... and to draw attention to the superior omega-3 article that alerted us to the story

by *Craig Weatherby*

Back in 2006, people around the world were captivated by an unfolding drama at the Sago Coal Mine in West Virginia, and the miraculous emergence of its sole survivor, Randal McCloy.

Oddly, very few media outlets focused on the (arguably) greater medical miracle that followed Mr. McCloy's rescue ... or its implications for deterring brain damage in similar circumstances.

McCloy's doctors presumed that he would face serious brain damage, because he'd been breathing air full of carbon monoxide and lost consciousness before being rescued.



He later described his pre-rescue situation to the Charleston Gazette:

"As my trapped co-workers lost consciousness one by one, the room grew still and I continued to sit and wait, unable to do much else. I have no idea how much time went by before I also passed out from the gas and smoke, awaiting rescue."

(CG 2006)

Here's the story again, including a link to an outstanding 2006 article published by Men's Health magazine ... which provided the best overview of omega-3 nutrition and health topics we've seen in a popular magazine.

If you missed it the first time around, we suspect you'll find the story as surprising and inspiring as we and many readers did.

Miner's "Miracle" Leads Stellar Omega-3/Health Summary

Top researchers quoted as deploring authorities' failure to push for increased omega-3 intake
by *Craig Weatherby*

We want to applaud *Men's Health* magazine for publishing the best omega-3 article we've seen in any publication intended for non-scientists.

The article's key point is summarized in this excerpt: "Scientists worldwide are praising a nutrient so powerful that it may help combat dozens of diseases. But don't expect an endorsement from our policy makers: They say we can do without."

The *Men's Health* piece – titled "The Government's Big Fish Story" – begins dramatically, with the story of Randal McCloy, the sole survivor of last year's Sago Coal Mine disaster in West Virginia. (He's pictured above, between two of his doctors.)

Mr. McCloy suffered extreme carbon monoxide exposure, which normally results in severe brain damage. While Mr. McCloy received the standard interventions, including hyperbaric oxygen treatment, these were not expected to prevent serious disability.

Instead, his neurosurgeon – Julian Bailes, M.D. of West Virginia University – believes the miner was spared only by the unprecedented decision to administer very high doses of omega-3 fish oil.

Dr. Bailes said McCloy had almost no measurable brain activity until they started feeding him fish oil through a tube, which provided huge doses of the two key omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA).

As the authors of [the *Men's Health* article](#) wrote, "... unexpectedly, McCloy emerged from his coma. This in itself was amazing, but he wasn't done. In the weeks that followed, he stunned even the most optimistic experts by recovering his memory and gradually regaining his ability to walk, talk, and see, a turnaround that many in the medical field called miraculous."

The conclusion of this part of the article is worth quoting:

"The omega-3s helped rebuild the damaged gray and white matter of his brain,' says Dr. Bailes, who now takes his own medicine, swallowing a fish-oil supplement each morning. On his orders, McCloy, still recuperating at home, continues to take fish oil daily. 'I would say he should be on it for a lifetime,' says Dr. Bailes. 'But then, I think everybody should.'"

(Large amounts of omega-3 DHA accumulate in the brain's grey matter during fetal and infant development. And research supports its ongoing importance to the tissues of adult brains: see "[Omega-3s Display More Brain-Mood Benefits](#)" and "[Mental Decline Slowed by Omega-3s](#)".)

Researchers interviewed by *Men's Health* deplored the failure of health authorities to advocate assertively for increased intake of omega-3s.

And unlike most popular articles on omega-3s, this one stresses the importance of decreasing Americans' intake of omega-6 fatty acids.

These pro-inflammatory, omega-3-blocking fats dominate American diets, thanks to their heavy presence in standard meats and poultry and in cheap vegetable oils – corn, soy, cottonseed, canola, and standard sunflower and safflower oils – and the processed and prepared foods that contain them. (Special "hi-oleic" sunflower and safflower oils – especially hi-oleic sunflower oils – have much less omega-6 fat.)

We urge you to read this incredibly informative, wonderfully written article and pass it on to friends and family. Click here to access "[The Government's Big Fish Story](#)".

[Editor's Note: We take issue with a comment in the article about omega-3s, made by Marion Nestle, Ph.D., M.P.H., of New York University: "The research so far has been mixed. I'll grant that they're healthy, but I don't think if you don't eat them you're going to die of a heart attack."

We've heard Dr. Nestle recommend omega-3s in other contexts, so we were surprised by her flippant comment. The issue is not whether you need to eat omega-3s to avoid dying of a heart attack tomorrow, but whether you will be healthier overall by eating amounts greater than most Americans do ... and there is little doubt of that.]

In addition to addressing some of the most fascinating aspects of omega-3s in human biology and evolution, the piece summarizes the adverse impacts of America's gross omega-3/omega-6 intake imbalance, the evidence of omega-3s' effects on major health conditions, and includes recommendations on supplemental omega-3s.

The article features cogent quotes from interviews with a number of leading researchers, including renowned omega-3 scientist William E. Lands, Ph.D., who has responded graciously to our requests for guidance concerning omega-3 fatty acids in human health, including this one.

"They're in the Dark Ages," says Bill Lands, Ph.D., a retired National Institutes of Health (NIH) biochemist who has written extensively about omega-3s and is widely considered the field's elder statesman. "The science was very clear 15 years ago. But they're not interested in science. All they're interested in doing is preserving the status quo, when they could be saving lives."

Dr. Lands discovered many of the basic functions of omega-3s as a former Professor at the Michigan Medical School and Director of Basic Research at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. He also authored an indispensable reference book titled *Fish, Omega-3s, and Human Health*.

We hope you will get a chance to read "[The Government's Big Fish Story](#)", and share it widely.

You can find even more omega-3 information by reading the recent, definitive book by *New York Times* science contributor Susan Allport, titled *Queen of Fats* (see "[Queen of Fats Tells Exciting, Untold Omega-3 Story](#)" and "[The Queen of Fats: Part II of Our Review](#)") and by diving deep into our [Vital Choices](#) newsletter archives.

Sources

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