

White gold shimmers in Veendam

Will magnesium chloride become Veendam's white gold? Richard Danel, a Groningen-based physician and Dave Janse, a mineralogist and chemical engineer from Veendam are investigating this. They have set up a knowledge centre in Veendam. Together with the scientists of the University of Groningen, the University Medical Centre Groningen and the Munich's Ludwig Maximilian University, they are researching the benefits of magnesium chloride.

By Marscha van Noesel

It is well known that people with skin diseases like psoriasis obtain relief from Dead Sea salt or magnesium chloride. Physician Richard Danel and mineralogist and chemical engineer Dave Janse now aim to demonstrate scientifically that magnesium dissolved in bath water is therapeutic for many more ailments and diseases. It might even be possible to create a therapeutic lake using the purest magnesium chloride that can be mined only in Veendam; and this lake could then compete with the Dead Sea. The Dutch Foundation of Skeptics (*Stichting Skepsis*) and allopathic physicians are currently maintaining their distance for the time being.

For more than 30 years, Veendam-based NedMag has been extracting industrial-grade magnesium at a depth of 1600 metres beneath the earth's surface in the village of Tripscompagnie. Scientific research in the United States recently confirmed to Messrs Danel and Janse that a magnesium deficiency in the body can contribute to ailments and diseases. And according to Richard Danel, people in the West have a chronic magnesium deficiency. This deficiency may be remedied by applying magnesium chloride to the skin in oil form or by dissolving pure magnesium chloride in bath water. Messrs Danel and Janse claim that Veendam's 'white gold' may be of great significance for human health and well-being in the future. Once this has been generally accepted, Dave Janse is even considering the creation of a therapeutic lake containing magnesium chloride in the east of the Province of Groningen, comparable to the Dead Sea in Israel.

Richard Danel and Dave Janse are convinced of the beneficial effects of magnesium oil or magnesium chloride added to bath water. While there is no scientific foundation for these effects, they are cautious with their words. That is why the gentlemen have set up the Magnesium Health Institute in Veendam. Richard Danel explains: "Our aim is to facilitate research through this Institute. As a physician, I can't just take anything for granted, even if I'm convinced we're right. We're now working hard and co-operating on thorough, well-founded research with the University of Groningen, the University Medical Centre Groningen and the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich."

Why might people have a magnesium deficiency? Aren't there enough minerals and vitamins in our diet? According to Dave Janse, Dutch farmland is so poor that today's agricultural products do not contain nearly enough magnesium. "The soil is exhausted, as it were. And magnesium is ignored in fertiliser production. Many decades will pass before the soil reabsorbs this mineral if we start adding it today," Dave Janse says.

Conversely, the Netherlands Nutrition Centre (*Voedingscentrum Nederland*) considers it entirely unnecessary to take extra magnesium chloride. The Centre's spokesman Roy van der Ploeg comments: "There are no indications whatsoever in our most recent research, the National food consumption survey 2003 (*Voedselconsumptiepeiling 2003*), that large groups of the Dutch population are suffering from a magnesium deficiency."

So what products contain magnesium? The Netherlands Nutrition Centre says there is sufficient magnesium in cereals, green vegetables, milk, dairy products and meat. Roy van der Ploeg continues: "A magnesium deficiency does not manifest itself readily, but when such a condition does occur, people can feel tired and listless, or suffer from muscle cramps and even cardiac arrhythmia in extreme cases. But it's difficult to determine whether these symptoms are the result of a magnesium deficiency. People can develop diarrhoea if they take too much magnesium, for example in tablet form."

Richard Danel has figures from American research from which he concludes that people in the West clearly do have a deficiency of this mineral. "Doctors request blood tests for their patients to determine a magnesium deficiency, but this almost always turns out to be at the correct level. Blood tests determine the contents of the blood and not what is found between the body cells. A device is now available that can indicate the concentration of magnesium in the blood but also the intracellular magnesium content. However, investigation into the significance of magnesium chloride is still clearly in its infancy here," Richard Danel says.

Jan Willem Nienhuys, Secretary of The Dutch Foundation of Skeptics (*Stichting Skepsis*) claims the substances contained in blood are found throughout the body: "If an individual's blood is found to contain 0.1 per cent alcohol, that percentage holds for the rest of his body, and this is particularly true of the brain, which consequently does not function quite so well."

Private clinic "Kop van Zuid" in Emmen offers magnesium baths to patients after treatment by a chiropractor. Health centre Fontana in Nieuweschans also offers magnesium-chloride therapy, as it has been known for some time that this can bring significant relief to psoriasis patients.

Allopathic medicine acknowledges that magnesium chloride has a strong laxative effect. It is sometimes prescribed for people suffering from constipation. The Dead Sea salt available from many health food shops and recently also available from discount supermarket Aldi also has a laxative effect, albeit less efficacious than magnesium chloride. A saleswoman in a health food shop claims that she frequently uses Dead Sea salt in her bath water to help detox her body.

So if Dead Sea salt or magnesium chloride have absolutely no dermal effect in their dissolved form, why do health insurance companies fund Dead Sea therapy? If the salt does not enter the body via the skin, why is there a laxative effect after a magnesium bath? These are non-issues as far as Richard Danel and Dave Janse are concerned. The two gentlemen regularly welcome scientists from every corner of the globe. Richard Danel lectures throughout the country and beyond to tell people about the world's purest source of natural magnesium chloride, which comes from Veendam.

Nowhere other than in Veendam is the product treated in a laboratory especially for its therapeutic effect and subsequently packaged to prevent it from further contamination, Dave Janse says. "Dead Sea salt contains many other materials. And it's also been exposed to the open air. All kinds of air pollution, including that of airplanes for example, precipitate into the Dead Sea. Our magnesium chloride is extracted from deep beneath the earth's surface and is subsequently treated so meticulously and checked for quality in the laboratory that we can safely guarantee that it is the purest possible naturally occurring magnesium chloride."

Richard Danel has a particular dislike of quackery. He is even a supporter of the Dutch Foundation of Skeptics (*Stichting Skepsis*). He is aware that much time may pass before people knowledge that he and Dave Janse are right. "How long did it take before there was any official recognition that iodine is good for the body. Or how long ago was it that people suffering from gastric ulcers had to undergo surgery? They are now prescribed a course of tablets and their symptoms disappear. Magnesium sulphate injections are now routinely administered in hospital to people who have suffered a heart attack, but magnesium chloride is likely to be equally effective if not better. We also know that women suffering from pre-eclampsia, who are administered magnesium chloride, bring healthier babies into the world than those who did not receive the product. Our goal is to provide proof of this. I intend to do my utmost to have magnesium chloride from Veendam formally registered as a medicine. We cannot achieve anything in the world of medicine otherwise."

Jan Willem Nienhuys of the Dutch Foundation of Skeptics (*Stichting Skepsis*) remains sceptical. "People may develop magnesium deficiency if they take too much diuretic medication, which in turn indicates that the kidneys simply remove any excess." According to Mr Nienhuys, it is impossible to increase the level of magnesium in the body by briefly sitting in a bath containing some magnesium chloride. "If you take a bath for a while you get wrinkled hands because the skin absorbs water. The thing here is that the skin only absorbs the water and not the salts dissolved in it. And that's a good thing, as somebody swimming in the sea for any length of time is otherwise at risk of absorbing far too much salt and suffering rapid death."

Richard Danel is eager to engage sceptics like Mr Nienhuys in discussion. He advises The Dutch Foundation of Skeptics (*Stichting Skepsis*) and the Netherlands Nutrition Centre (*Voedingscentrum Nederland*) to study the most recent findings of the FDA (American Food & Drug Administration), from which it emerges that a human needs 400 to 600 mg each day, while the average intake via food is currently 200 to 300 mg. "I'm disappointed by the reaction of the Foundation of Skeptics. Let's look at the effect of wrinkled skin, for example. If the skin does not absorb magnesium chloride, how can we believe that hormone patches or nicotine patches are effective? The body also absorbs the materials administered in this way via the skin, doesn't it? And these are even covered by the healthcare insurers. So is this entirely unjustified? I hope that scientists out there are willing to study mainly foreign scientific literature on our magnesium chloride, if only to dispel their scepticism in this regard."

Caption: Dave Janse (left) and Richard Danel at NedMag.
Photos: Dennis F. Beek