

HEALTH AND WELLNESS NEWS ITEMS – April 2014

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If any of these abstracts seem relevant to your care, be sure to consult with your personal physician before changing your treatment.

1. F.D.A. CHALLENGES THE FOOD INDUSTRY

At the end of 2013, the Food and Drug Administration generated a number of new policies and proposals aimed at regulating pharmaceutical, hygiene, and food products. These regulations to “protect the public health” have been passed over the objections of the industries that produce these products.

Last year, the F.D.A. passed tougher restrictions on narcotic painkillers and ruled that soap manufacturers have one year to produce evidence that antibacterial chemicals in liquid soaps are safe and more effective than plain soaps. The food industry is now facing the brunt of more aggressive regulation.

The F.D.A. put in place a new policy to **phase out the indiscriminate use of antibiotics in cows, pigs, and chicken raised for meat**. For decades, healthy animals have received antibiotics in their feed or water; such additions made the animals bigger and fatter and presumably less susceptible to disease. It also endangered human health by fueling the growing epidemic of antibiotic resistance. Two million Americans fall sick to antibiotic-resistant infections every year and 23,000 of them die. In this country, more antibiotic is used for animals than for humans. Under the new policy, a veterinarian would be required to supervise the use of antibiotics for animals.

The F.D.A. proposed measures that would all but **eliminate trans fats from the food supply**. For three decades, advocates have been trying to get government to remove these artery-clogging, artificial fats from foods. The agency proposed that partially hydrogenated oils, the source of trans fats, would no longer be “generally recognized as safe.” Trans fats are known to raise “bad cholesterol” levels and lower “good cholesterol” levels. A nutrition epidemiologist is quoted as saying “This is the final slam dunk on the trans fat issue.”

Most recently, the F.D.A. proposed major **changes to nutrition labeling on food packages**. With reference to prior labeling, a national figure is quoted as saying “Unless you had a thesaurus, a calculator, and a degree in nutrition, you were out of luck.” The proposal aims to make labels easier to understand and to address the obesity epidemic. Changes include (a) putting calorie counts in large type, (b) adding a separate line for added sugars, (c) making portion size realistic, and (d) requiring labels on additional food categories.

Sources: *Consumer Reports on Health*, 29, April 2014, Pgs. 1, 4, 5

The New York Times, 11 December, 2013; 7 November, 2013; 27 February, 2014

Health & Wellness News Items, February, 2014, Pg. 3

Health and Wellness News Items, 4/14, Pg 1

2. HEART FAILURE AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

Many more elderly patients with heart failure have cognitive impairment than their treating cardiologists realize, a recent study found.

Seventy cardiologists in France who treated 912 ambulatory heart failure patients age 70 or above suspected that 12% of the patients had memory impairment. However, careful study revealed that 46% of the patients had memory impairment and 23% had severe memory impairment. Identification of these patients is important because management of their disease requires "...patient education that can be difficult to understand, remember, and manage for patients with cognitive impairment," the authors wrote. Knowing that decreased cognitive function is common among older patients with heart failure, cardiologists could more frequently use screening tools that would help identify patients at risk.

The authors mention three possible reasons for the association of heart failure and memory impairment: common risk factors such as hypertension, diabetes, or lipid abnormalities; focal brain vascular lesions; and decreased cardiac output. Regardless of the cause, better identification of impairment could allow physicians to take steps (such as pill boxes or nurse visits) to improve heart failure patients' ability to care for themselves.

Sources: *ACP Internist*, 4 February 2014

American Journal of Cardiology doi: 10.1016/j.amjcard. 2013.12.032

3. DROP IN BLOOD PRESSURE ASSOCIATED WITH MEDICATION FOR ENLARGED PROSTATE

The medication tamsulosin has been associated with increased hospitalizations for a severe drop in blood pressure (hypotension). Tamsulosin (Flomax®) is used to relieve symptoms of benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), an enlargement of the prostate.

A recent review of its use showed severe hypotension requiring hospitalization occurred during the first 8 weeks of treatment at about twice the rate as an alternative drug used for the same purpose. Researchers studied more than 383,500 men ages 40 to 85 started on either tamsulosin or another class of drugs used for BPH known as 5ARIs (e.g., finasteride {Proscar} and dutasteride {Avodart}).

The incidence of severe hypotension occurred with less frequency after the first 8 weeks of therapy, at a rate similar to that seen with the 5ARI drugs. However, if tamsulosin was stopped and then restarted later, a similar incidence of severe hypotension recurred. Starting and stopping the drug would expose users to a greater risk of hypotension. Researchers stated that patients who are adherent to tamsulosin may achieve better control of lower urinary tract symptoms and could result in a lower risk of falls. They advised physicians to counsel patients about the drug's apparent "first dose phenomenon."

Sources: *ACP Internist Weekly*, 19 November, 2013

The British Medical Journal, 5 November, 2013

Health and Wellness News Items, 4/14, Pg 2

4. HOOFING IT AWAY FROM BEEF

If you are trying to decide between beef and chicken, the Executive Director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest suggests that health, environmental, and animal rights concerns are on the side of the chicken, especially if the beef is from corn-fed feedlots.

***Health.** Dr. Jacobson points out that fatty red meat and processed meats derived from it clog the arteries and promote colon cancer.

***Environment.** Whether raised in feedlots or on the range, cattle have a large impact on the environment. The methane generated by cattle contributes mightily to climate

change and the corn and other grains grown for cattle feed require huge amounts of fertilizer, pesticide, water, and fossil fuel.

***Animal welfare.** The high-grain diet fed to cattle in feedlots can cause digestive, hoof, and liver diseases and necessitate the continuous use of antibiotics, which in turn can trigger the growth of antibiotic-resistant pathogens that can affect cattle and humans.

Dr. Jacobson encourages you to "...skip the burgers and steaks" and encourage your dining service "to save money, the environment, and lives by serving less beef."

Source: *Nutrition Action Healthletter*, April 2014, Pg. 2

5. **MY LIFE AS A DOG OWNER**

Personal Health columnist and septuagenarian, Jane Brody, provides her readers with personal observations and a literature survey on the health benefits of living with a companion dog. Speaking personally as a recent dog owner, she observes that Max, her seven month-old puppy, makes her laugh many times a day. "But perhaps the most interesting benefit has been the scores of people I've met on the street ... who admire him and talk to me. Max has definitely increased my interpersonal contacts and enhanced my social life."

Ms. Brody proceeds to review the body of published evidence that pet ownership can foster cardiovascular health, resistance to stress, social connectivity, and enhanced longevity. A 1980 study showed that people with pets were more likely to be alive one year after they were discharged from a coronary care unit. Pet ownership was linked to lower values of blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglycerides. Studies also showed that elderly walkers of dogs are more physically fit and engage in more regular exercise than do those who walk with human companions. Other studies report that older walkers of dogs are less dissatisfied with their social, physical, and emotional states.

The column ends with a warning that living with a companion animal involves responsibilities and the benefits you derive from the animal are linked to these responsibilities.

Source: *The New York Times*, 8 April, 2014

Health and Wellness News Items, 4/14, Pg 3

6. **TAI CHI MAY PLAY A ROLE IN DEPRESSION RELIEF**

"Mayo Clinic experts say that mind-body practices such as tai chi, qi gong, and yoga have a long history of benefiting health." Now, a paper in the *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* summarizes evidence from multiple clinical studies and concludes that the traditional Chinese exercises of tai chi and qi gong may help reduce stress, anxiety, mood disturbances, and symptoms of depression. Moreover, the paper noted evidence that these practices improved quality-of-life factors related to chronic conditions including heart and lung disease, arthritis, fibromyalgia, and tension headaches. The authors note that several studies suggest that tai chi may also reduce the risk of falling for older adults. These low-impact exercises connect flowing movements to changes in mental focus, breathing, coordination, and relaxation.

Source: www.HealthLetter.MayoClinic.com, October 2013, Pg.4

7. **GOT HEARTBURN? THE BEST TREATMENT FOR YOU**

Consumer Reports on Health provides the following advice for heartburn:

*Get the right drug. Proton pump inhibitor (PPIs) are over prescribed. Up to 70% of people taking these drugs (such as *Nexium* and *Prilosec*) might not need such strong medication. PPIs are intended for gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD), when heartburn occurs twice a week for many weeks. Less frequent “run-of-the-mill” heartburn can be treated with drugs such as *Maalox*, *Mylanta*, *Rolaids*, Tums, *Pepcid AC*, or *Zantac 75*; these over-the-counter drugs tend to have fewer side effects and are cheaper.

*Know the risks. Treatment with PPIs increases the risk of pneumonia and *C. difficile* infections, bone fractures, and vitamin B12 deficiency. On the other hand, self-medication with over-the-counter heartburn drugs can mask underlying health problems such as an ulcer, esophageal cancer, gallstones, or heart disease. “So, before starting any heartburn drug, see a doctor.”

*Make lifestyle changes. Raise the head of your bed to prevent acid from traveling upward to your esophagus, lose weight to reduce pressure on the stomach, avoid eating before bedtime, and cut back on foods that cause symptoms.

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health*, 29, April 2014, Pg. 10

8. QUICK QUERIES: A TRUE/FALSE QUIZ ON ABSTRACTS FROM THIS ISSUE

_____ The F.D.A. has plans to eliminate trans fats from foods and antibiotics from healthy animals raised on farms.

_____ The first sign of heartburn is a burning sensation in the upper abdomen, especially after eating.

_____ Dog ownership is increasing because of the health benefits of walking a dog.

_____ The Center for Science and Public Policy has found that beef from cattle fattened with ractopamine is safe to eat.

Answers to #8: T, F, F, F, F