

HEALTH AND WELLNESS NEWS ITEMS – July 2013

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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. VEGETARIANS ARE AT LOWER RISK OF HEART DISEASE

An 11-year research project involving 45,000 adults in England has established that following a vegetarian diet can reduce the risk of a heart attack by 32%. This conclusion was reached after statistically adjusting for risk factors such as smoking and activity levels. The vegetarian participants ate no meat or fish, but some consumed eggs and dairy. Even those who were on the diet for less than five years had a reduced risk of heart trouble. The vegetarians also exhibited lower blood pressure and better cholesterol levels than did the non-vegetarians.

Experts in the field attribute the observed reduction in heart disease to the reduction in dietary fats and the increase in dietary disease-preventing phytochemicals, such as antioxidant vitamins. They conclude that, whether or not you are a vegetarian, it is never too late to get heart health benefits by minimizing your intake of fats and increasing your consumption of minimally processed plant-based foods.

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

2. WHEN TO SAY “WHOA” TO YOUR DOCTOR

The following advice was reprinted from *Consumer Reports on Health*.

Common tests and procedures you might not need:

- *EKGs and stress tests unless you have heart disease symptoms
- *Imaging tests for lower-back pain
- *CT scans and MRIs for headaches
- *Bone density scans for low-risk women
- *Antibiotics for sinusitis

Ask these questions:

- *Do I really need this test or procedure?
- *Are there simpler, safer options?
- *What are the potential complications versus possible benefits?
- *What happens if I do nothing?
- *Are there less expensive alternatives?

Source: *The Plain Dealer*, 25 July 2013

Editorial Comment: The above abstract is pertinent as this community educates itself on the concept of “Slow Medicine.” Based on evidence provided in the “Bitter Pill” article in the March 4, 2013 issue of “Time”(see “Health & Wellness News Items”, March/April, 2013), the larger medical community would be expected to be split on the validity of the above advice.

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3. POINTERS ON SUNGLASSES

Everyone who spends time outside should wear sunglasses! Their most important feature is how well they shield your eyes from ultraviolet rays and blue light. Maximal UV protection comes from clear chemicals that are incorporated in the lenses during manufacture or

applied as a coating. Be aware that coating can be lost over time. One way to be assured of benefit is to have an optician check your lenses. Avoid blue tinted lenses that let in more blue light. Gray, brown, and green lenses produce the least color distortion and are good for all around wear and driving.

The larger the frames the better. Wrap around glasses block light from the side, but may cause distortion. Darker does not mean better protection but does block more light and reduce glare. Glasses should be dark enough that you don't see your eyes when looking in a mirror but, light enough so you can see curbs, stoplights, and stairs. Generally, you need to spend between \$20 and \$60 for an adequate pair.

Sun damage is cumulative, so the more time you spend outdoors with your eyes unprotected, the greater your lifetime risk. Exposure is implicated in a range of eye conditions including cataracts, skin cancer on the lids and around the eyes, and even melanoma of the eye itself. Blue light is particularly damaging to internal eye tissues and over time may permanently damage the retina, leading to macular degeneration.

Best we all take care of our eyes!

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Health Letter*, 29 (13), August 2013

4. THE ZEN OF SWIMMING

Swimming is second only to walking as a popular recreation in this country. It is ideal for people who have arthritis or worn out knee or hip joints and can be safe and therapeutic for those who suffer back pain. It helps to improve stamina and preserve cardiac and respiratory function. A researcher at Indiana University found evidence of improved mental function in older swimmers.

Swimming can counter the stress of our hurried lives. Swimmers claim that sprints keep them sane, that the weightlessness of being in the water relieves stress. Quoting from a book by Lynn Sherr entitled *Swim: Why We Love the Water*, "Swimming stretches my body beyond earthly limits, helping to soothe every ache and caress every muscle. But it is also an inward journey, a time of quiet contemplation, when, encased in an element at once hostile and familiar, I find myself at peace, able—and eager—to flex my mind, imaging new possibilities, to work things out without the startling interruptions of human voice or modern life. The silence is stunning. Swimming forces you to focus and set the mood to meditate; it allows you to dream big dreams."

Obstacles to swimming include fear of water, not knowing how to swim or breathe correctly, and unwillingness to "get my hair wet." Swim lessons and goggles can help with learning to swim and with fear of water.

Source: *The New York Times*, Personal Health, 15 May 2012

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5. HELP FOR URINARY-TRACT INFECTIONS

Urinary-tract infections (UTIs) are the most common bacterial infections in this country. Approximately 80% of women will get at least one UTI and, after age 50, men get infected at a similar rate as women. The *E. coli* that cause most of these infections are becoming increasingly resistant to the antibiotics available to fight them. In contrast to the painful urination symptoms experienced by younger patients, the symptoms of older adults are more likely to be vague, such as feeling tired and weak with muscle and abdominal pain.

UTIs are extremely common in long-term care facilities and doctors commonly prescribe antibiotics when analysis shows bacteria in a patient's urine, even if no other UTI symptoms are present. Such treatment may do more harm than good. Researchers at Duke University conclude that treating such patients for asymptomatic infections offered no

major benefits, but rather can lead to antibiotic-related adverse effects and recurrent infections with drug-resistant bacteria. Alternative approaches for treating uncomplicated UTIs are yielding encouraging results. Preliminary studies indicate that anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen might help fight these infections.

Attention has also focused on prevention of *E. coli* infections. Probiotics such as lactobacillus strains of bacteria may be helpful. In contrast, a review of the literature concludes that cranberry juice does not provide significant protection. Experts in the field provide us with the following preventive recommendations:

- *Drink at least 48 ounces of water a day (unless you have kidney failure)
- *Urinate when the urge first arises
- *Don't hurry urination; completely empty the bladder
- *Urinate shortly after any sexual intercourse.

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health*, July 2013, Pgs. 6,7

6. **ANEMIA SHOULD RAISE A RED FLAG**

"Anemia is not a disease but a sign of one, and its causes are many". The most frequent cause of anemia is iron deficiency due to blood loss. In an aging population, bleeding from the GI tract is the leading source, but bleeding from ulcers, cancer, and the frequent use of nonsteroidal pain killers is likewise common. Iron deficiency can also result from celiac disease or from inadequate dietary iron, a deficiency more often seen in vegans. A decrease in red cell production is seen when insufficient vitamin B12 is available; the absorption of this vitamin from the diet is impaired in a number of diseases and in one-third of those over 60.

Anemia is defined as a deficiency in hemoglobin. Hemoglobin levels in blood can be determined by counting red blood cells, measuring the visible absorbance, or determining the hematocrit, which is the percentage of blood volume occupied by the cells.

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health*, July 2013, Pg. 11

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7. **LET US "EGG" YOU ON**

There has been much conflicting advice concerning the hazards or the desirability of eggs as part of the daily diet. What's a person to do? The concern has been that their high cholesterol content would raise blood cholesterol and increase the risk of heart disease. Recent studies show that dietary cholesterol has little effect on blood cholesterol in most people; it is saturated and trans fats that are the much bigger culprits.

In a small study at the University of Connecticut, 40 middle-aged people with coronary risk factors, daily ate either three eggs or cholesterol-free egg substitute, while also restricting carbohydrates. After twelve weeks, neither group showed a change in blood total cholesterol or LDL (bad) cholesterol. However, the egg-eater group had a greater boost in HDL (good) cholesterol as well as an increase in the size of both HDL and LDL particles (bigger is better).

Another paper analyzed the results of eight prior studies that involved nearly half a million people who had been followed for 8 to 22 years. The analysis showed no correlation between egg consumption (one/day) and heart disease or stroke. An exception may be people with diabetes.

Eggs are an excellent and relatively inexpensive source of protein, vitamins,

minerals, and other nutrients. If you like them and don't have diabetes, enjoy them!

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Health Letter*, 29 (13) August 2013

8. DEMENTIA DRUGS FOR THE HEART

Research published in *The European Heart Journal* suggests that a drug used to treat dementia may also prevent heart disease. A review of the records of 7,073 Alzheimer's patients who were taking cholinesterase inhibitors (e.g., Aricept, Exelon, Reminyl) revealed that these drugs reduced both the rates of heart attacks and death rate by about 35%. The risk reduced even further as dose increased. Follow-up for patients averaged 17 months.

The investigators describe this association as "very interesting" and suggest that the effectiveness may depend on the anti-inflammatory properties of the inhibitors. However, they warn that a successful clinical trial will be necessary before doctors can prescribe these drugs to prevent cardiovascular disease.

Source: *New York Times*, 11 June 2013

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

- _____ Vegetarian diet and dementia drugs may reduce the risk of heart disease.
- _____ The ability to block UV irradiation is based on the color of sunglasses.
- _____ The detection of any bacteria in urine warrants an immediate prescription of antibiotic, even in the absence of any symptoms.
- _____ Anemia is often the result of blood loss or a deficiency of vitamin B12.
- _____ The daily consumption of an egg increases blood cholesterol and leads to higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

Answers to # 9: T, F, F, T, F