

HEALTH AND WELLNESS NEWS ITEMS – June 2012

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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. **SWIM YOUR HYPERTENSION AWAY**

According to a recent study published in the *American Journal of Cardiology*, swimming is a good way to reduce blood pressure. A group of adults (average age of 60) with pre-hypertension or mild hypertension participated in a 12-week program in which they swam 3 or 4 times a week. Although there was no weight loss, average systolic blood pressure (the top number) dropped 9 points. Moreover, swimmers exhibited improved blood vessel functioning, as measured by ultrasound. Diastolic blood pressure was unchanged. Although other forms of exercise also reduce blood pressure, swimming may be more advantageous for those with musculoskeletal problems, since it places little stress on joints.

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter*, June 2012

2. **COFFEE AND HEALTH—THE LATEST BUZZ**

The Mayo Clinic has provided the following summary of coffee's pros and cons related to health.

The Pros--Drinking two or more cups of coffee each day appears to lower substantially the risk of type 2 diabetes; it has been proposed that the chlorogenic acid and caffeine of coffee prevent the death of pancreatic cells. Numerous studies indicate that regular coffee consumption may also lower the risk of Parkinson's Disease. Other studies show that coffee reduces the risk of endometrial, pancreatic, and hepatic cancers.

The Cons--On the other hand, coffee may not be of help and may possibly be harmful with regard to the following areas of health. Coffee consumption (2 ½ cups/day) modestly increases the risk of osteoporosis and bone fractures, apparently by caffeine interfering with calcium absorption and increasing urinary calcium excretion; however, this effect is minimal if calcium intake is adequate. Occasional coffee consumption may lead to a temporary rise in blood pressure; this rise is not observed with regular coffee drinkers. A review of 13 studies, suggests that high or increased coffee consumption might increase the risk of lung cancer; however, additional study is needed to rule out the effects of smoking and other factors.

Source: www.HealthLetter.MayoClinic.com, June 2012, Pg. 7

3. **A HIGH-FIBER DIET MAY HELP YOU LIVE LONGER**

A high-fiber diet has long been known to improve bowel function. Furthermore, a study has shown that individuals who ate more high-fiber foods have a 22% lower overall risk of death over a 9-year time period than those who ate approximately half that amount of fiber. Participants ingested between 12 and 29 grams of fiber per day. The study involved nearly 390,000 adults, ages 50-71. Data were corrected for other variables.

Analysis of the data revealed that the lower risk of death was due to reduction in (a) cardiovascular disease such as heart attack and stroke, (b) cancer for men (but not for women), and (c) infections and respiratory diseases. These benefits were attributed to the known effects of high-fiber diets in reducing the blood levels of cholesterol and glucose, lowering blood pressure, and preventing inflammation. Since fiber was eaten as high-fiber foods rather than as supplements, it is not known to what extent the health benefits can be attributed to the fiber itself rather than to the array of other disease-fighting compounds that are present in high-fiber foods.

Sources: www.HealthLetter.MayoClinic.com, June 2012, Pg. 4
Arch. Int. Med., 14 February 2011

4. **CHRONIC PAIN MANAGEMENT**

A review of recent research on chronic pain management includes a description of a promising new approach. It starts with the identification of a gene that controls the production of *encephalin*, one of our body's self-made pain relievers. The gene has been combined with a herpes simplex virus which has been modified to prevent its self-multiplication. This pair is then injected into skin near the source of pain; the virus, as it does in nature, inserts itself into adjacent nerves and the gene renders these nerves unable to transmit painful stimuli.

Trials with a small number of people indicate that the procedure is safe and the treatment works extremely well. This gene therapy is long lasting and doesn't induce tolerance as do opiates. If the initial results are confirmed, it may turn out to be an enormous boon for those with conditions producing chronic pain, such as spinal stenosis, arthritis, some types of postoperative pain, and terminal cancers.

Sources: *PittMed* (The U. of Pittsburgh Medical School alumni magazine), Spring 2012, Pgs. 21-25
Annals of Neurology, 2011

5. **SPEED UP YOUR WALKING**

Research from the Cooper Institute for Aerobic Research shows that women who walk speeds of 3 to 5 miles per hour, five days a week for 24 weeks, all gain in fitness. But those who walked the fastest benefited most—as much as runners. Picking up speed gives more of a cardiovascular workout and burns more calories, especially when pumping your arms. Speed walking boosts muscle activity in the hips and ankles and works out the upper body as well. Set a goal and then start slowly and gradually build up the pace. This can also be done on a treadmill, if preferred. People who can walk faster have lower mortality rates. Still, walking even at a slow pace is better than not walking at all.

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter*, 28, Issue 9

6. **WELLNESS MADE EASY!**

Here are some miscellaneous tips for staying well:

- Older drivers should pay special attention at intersections. A recent analysis suggests that as a result of focusing exclusively on what's in front of them, seniors develop an unsafe habit of failing to scan adequately for cars coming from their sides. A brief simple training program can remedy this problem.
- Watch out for alcoholic drinks made with artificially sweetened "diet" mixers. If consumed on an empty stomach, they can cause the alcohol to be absorbed more rapidly and carbonation increases the absorption even faster. Just one mixed drink containing diet soda can raise your blood alcohol level beyond the legal limit.
- Research at Tufts University provides evidence for brain benefits from eating berries, especially those with intense coloring. These phytochemical pigments are potent antioxidants that fight oxidative cell damage and may reduce the risk of cancer and heart disease as well as keep the brain healthy.

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter*, June 2012, Pg. 8

7. **A NEW CANCER TREATMENT POSSIBILITY**

In the 40 some years since Richard Nixon famously declared war on cancer, therapeutic progress has been impressive but spotty. Dr. S. Mukherjee's magisterial 2011 book, "The Emperor of all Maladies," details the protean nature of the disease that often stymies researchers. Now a new approach has raised expectations. A Sloan-Kettering physician, J. Allison, has coordinated studies into why our own lymphocytes, called "killer T cells," don't attack certain tumors as they do all cells and organisms that the body recognizes as "foreign." It turns out that some malignancies produce an antigen called CTLA-4 that inactivates killer T-cells. Allison has produced an antibody to CTLA-4 that restores the T-cells' ability to attack and destroy these growths. Preliminary experiments have shown significant success in treating certain clinical cases. If larger follow-up studies confirm the early findings, an effective new tool will have arrived!

Source: *The New Yorker*, 23 April 2012, Pgs. 24-30

8. **MELANOMA AWARENESS**

Studies show that sun exposure is responsible for the development of nearly two-thirds of all melanomas and more than 1 million new skin cancers are expected to be diagnosed this year. Consider the following tips for healthy summer skin:

- Be a good role model for children by using sunscreen and avoiding the sun.
- Use sunscreen with a minimum 30 SPF; apply 1 oz. to exposed areas of skin.
- Seek shade between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. when UV rays are strongest.
- Avoid tanning beds and sun lamps.
- Relieve sun-parched skin by using moisturizing body washes and applying lotion to damp skin after bathing.
- Self-examine your skin. Remember your ABCs when examining moles: Asymmetry, Borders, Color. Have a physician look at any mole that is asymmetrical, has a jagged uneven border, or is mottled in color.

Source: *My.clevelandclinic.org*, May 2012

9. CHOOSING THE BEST SUNGLASSES

Ultraviolet rays from the sun can do more than damage your skin. They also can damage your eyesight. As we age, our eyes become more sensitive to light. Wearing sunglasses with appropriate UV protection is one of the best – and easiest – ways to help protect your eyes and decrease your risk of age-related eye diseases in the future. Polarized lenses are most effective in reducing glare. Brown, grey, green, and yellow lenses are best at minimizing color distortion, although color is less important than UV rating. Select sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB light and select those with the highest level of protection you can find (usually printed right on the tag). UV protection is available in all price ranges. Wear sunglasses regularly when you're outdoors – on your nose, not on top of your head!

Source: *Cleveland Clinic Catalyst enews*, March 2012

10. IS THAT DENTAL X-RAY NECESSARY?

Dental X-rays, when used appropriately, are valuable in detecting cavities, gum disease, and other dental problems. But when overused, dental radiography may expose patients to unnecessary radiation and expense. Guidelines recommend bitewing X-rays every 2-3 years for adults with a history of few or no cavities and no new symptoms; such imaging of the crowns of teeth should be repeated every 18 months for cavity-prone adults. Only special problems justify the radiation exposure associated with repeated full-head and jaw X-rays, panoramographs, or 3-D computed tomography. Although dentists and the American Dental Association are now more open to consumer concerns, you may have to be persistent in rejecting unnecessary radiation.

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health*, July 2012, Pg. 11

11. GETTING MORE PREVENTION ATTENTION

Statistical analysis has approximated the number of lives that could be saved if more Americans would take advantage of the following four steps of preventive medicine.

- If 90% of adult men at risk of heart attack or stroke and 90% of adult women at risk of stroke took **aspirin daily**, 45,000 lives would be saved.
- If 90% of smokers received **smoking cessation counseling and support**, 42,000 lives would be saved.
- If 90% of adults older than 50 were **screened for colorectal cancer** every 10 years, 14,000 lives would be saved.
- If 90% of those older than 6 months received an **annual flu shot**, 12,000 lives would be saved.

Presently, these preventive services are obtained by only ¼ to ½ of these targeted Americans.

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health*, July 2012, Pg. 6

