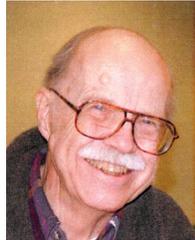


HEALTH AND WELLNESS NEWS ITEMS – May 2012

Abstracted and produced at Kendal at Oberlin by Nancy Beauchamp, Jerry Berner, Don Hultquist (editor), Nancy Hultquist (producer), Pam Lenz, Don Parker, Paul Spierling, and May Zitani and at Kendal on Hudson by John Blake (editor), Norman Sissman, and Fran Kelly (producer). (See photos below of our collaborators at Kendal on Hudson.)

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



John Blake



Norman Sissman



Fran Kelly

1. **“GET MOVING” BECOMES MORE UNDERSTANDABLE**

The linear relationship between exercise and well-being has long been established by folklore and population studies. Now, investigators have discovered molecular mechanisms to help explain the health benefits of activities like walking. In mice, they found that active muscles secrete a group of enzymes dubbed **myokines** that act on fat tissue to improve metabolism and lead to weight loss. After identifying these compounds, they found that humans who exercise regularly have twice the plasma levels of one of these myokines called irisin. So – science confirms an old adage and supplies data to refute the rationales of couch potatoes.

This study also has a much broader significance in that it provides a conceptual basis for how muscles communicate with other tissues through myokines, thus offering protection against a network of diseases including cardiovascular problems, type 2 diabetes, cancer, dementia, and osteoporosis.

Source: *New England Journal of Medicine*, 366: 19 April 2012, Pgs. 1544-1545

2. **THE CASE FOR BARLEY—A GRAIN OF WISDOM**

Barley has been cultivated for 10,000 years. Its well-founded status as a healthy food is based on its very high levels of soluble and insoluble fiber, protein, minerals, vitamins, and other phytochemicals.

This grain has a higher fiber content than oats, long-grain brown rice, whole-wheat, quinoa, spelt, and other grains. Barley, along with oats, carries an FDA-approved health claim that it reduces risk of heart disease since its soluble fiber has the ability to reduce “bad cholesterol.” Furthermore, like other fiber-rich grains, barley is expected to reduce the risk of diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease by controlling blood sugar, decreasing appetite, and reducing visceral fat.

Barley can be conveniently incorporated into your diet by adding it to soups, stews, salads, other grains, cereals, and baked goods. Individuals with gluten intolerance or celiac disease should avoid this grain.

Source: *Berkeley Wellness Letter*, on line, June 2012, Pg. 5

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3. **BLUE LIGHT HAS A DARK SIDE**

The effect of light on human behavior and sleep patterns is well-known. The mechanism of this effect apparently involves suppression of the secretion of melatonin, the hormone that controls the circadian rhythm. Even dim light interferes with this secretion and the circadian

rhythm. Light exposure during the day is beneficial—improving alertness, reaction time, and mood—but light at night is disruptive—interfering with sleep and perhaps contributing to the development of various diseases. Study after study has linked night-time light exposure to increasing incidence of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and obesity.

Recent preliminary studies indicate that light in the blue wavelength range is most beneficial during the day and most disruptive at night. Red light has the least effect. The researchers worry that exposure to blue light is increasing as the population spends more time exposed to the bluish light of electronic screens, CFL bulbs, and LED lights. They suggest that individuals be exposed to lots of bright light during the day and to minimal light (especially minimal blue light) at night. This can be accomplished by using dim, red nightlights and avoiding bright lights and bright screens during the hours before bedtime. If the pre-bedtime exposure is unavoidable, consider wearing blue-blocking glasses.

Another clinical research group recommends the administration of melatonin to geriatric patients who suffer from disruptive sleep and consequent day-time fatigue. Melatonin is now available over-the-counter or as a prescription. It reportedly can be used safely, but consult your physician.

Sources: *Harvard Health Letter*, May 2012, Pg. 4

Current Psychiatry, 11 (4): April 2012, Pg. 38

4. THE HEALING POWER OF THE ARTS

Researchers are finding that making time for the practice of the arts can help you recover from a variety of ailments and may help keep you from future complications.

In May 2011, researchers at the University of Granada in Spain found that listening to soothing music while practicing relaxation techniques such as slow, deep breathing could improve the quality of life for patients battling the chronic pain of fibromyalgia. The patients slept better, suffered less anxiety, and reported less pain than a group that didn't use music therapy. A 2008 study of depression found that music therapy, combined with antidepressant medication and counseling, dramatically increased the likelihood that the patients would feel better. University of Rochester staff found that patients with leukemia, lymphoma, and solid tumors who underwent a bone marrow transplant experienced less pain and nausea if they took advantage of music therapy. Moreover, the new bone marrow took hold much faster.

Art therapy is another promising area of treatment. Some hospitals now offer patients the opportunity to select the images that hang in their rooms during a stay and others provide patients the opportunity to produce their own masterpieces. Researchers at Texas A & M University have found that patients have lower blood pressure, less anxiety, higher measures of immunity, and shorter recovery times when they have art hanging in their rooms.

When you are checking into a hospital, ask about the arts programs they offer, and be sure to take advantage of them.

Source: *Newsletter of Northern Westchester Hospital*, Mt. Kisco NY, Spring 2011, Pg. 3

Health and Wellness News Items, 5/12, Pg. 2

5. IS IT AN ALLERGY OR A SINUS INFECTION?

Springtime may bring you congestion, a stuffy nose, runny eyes, and an aching head. Effective treatment requires that you first know whether your symptoms arise from an allergy to springtime pollen or from sinusitis, an infection in the nasal passages that is often a complication of a cold.

The two maladies can be distinguished one from the other by remembering that allergies are characterized by clear nasal discharge and dark circles under the eyes and typically start or worsen in the spring or fall. On the other hand, the classic symptoms of sinusitis are a yellow, green, or gray nasal discharge; discomfort in the cheeks, upper jaw, or above or below the eyes; and frequently fever, fatigue, and aching muscles. Sinus infections happen throughout the year but more often in cold season or flu season. If necessary, tests

can help to confirm a diagnosis. For example, a nasal smear with many eosinophils suggests an allergy and a smear with many neutrophils suggests a bacterial infection. A virus infection would generate neither of these types of white cells.

A diagnosis of an allergy should be addressed by limiting exposure to the allergen and by medicating with an antihistamine, a steroid nasal spray, or, if necessary, with allergy shots (immunotherapy). The author recommends the use of less expensive, generic, non-prescription drugs and, in the case of antihistamine therapy, recommends the newer drugs that are less likely to cause drowsiness.

A diagnosis of sinusitis should be addressed using the following self-help measures-- plenty of rest, warm fluids, humidity, and gargling with salt water. Consult your physician in choosing a prescription or over-the-counter medication to relieve persistent sinusitis. The author urges caution in the use of decongestants such as pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) and warns against side effects, especially for patients with diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and hyperthyroidism. Antibiotic use should be minimized since it is completely ineffective against allergies and virus infections and since overuse and misuse against bacterial infections generates antibiotic-resistant germs.

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health*, June 2012, Pgs. 8-9

6. **“GOOD CHOLESTEROL” QUESTIONED**

The "bad" designation for LDL cholesterol has been well established, but new evidence is calling into question the "good" label for HDL cholesterol. A recent study published in the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, used genetic information to show that people who inherit a trait for higher HDL levels do not have less heart disease than those who inherit slightly lower levels. Researchers in the field, not connected with the published study, found the results "compelling and disturbing", according to interviews reported in *The New York Times*. Dr. Steven Nissen, chair of cardiovascular medicine at Cleveland Clinic, said that subsets of HDL, not routinely measured, may yet prove to be the protective factor. There are many factors that accompany lower HDL and these may be having a greater influence on the incidence of heart disease; raising HDL, per se, may not confer protection if factors such as diabetes, obesity, smoking, being sedentary, and insulin resistance are not treated. The take-home message is to consider the whole picture, without putting too much credence in the "good" moniker of HDL.

Sources: *The New York Times*, 17 May 2012

The Lancet, published on-line 16 May 2012

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7. **FEATHERS—A VEHICLE FOR REENTRY OF DRUGS INTO FOOD**

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University and Arizona State University have uncovered a surprising and alarming route by which antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals can reenter our food sources. The research established that drugs and other contaminants arise in part from recycling the inedible by-products of poultry slaughtering. The U.S. consumption of billions of chickens and turkeys each year generates approximately 20 billion pounds of inedible poultry parts, including 4.4 billion pounds of feathers. The feathers are converted into a “feather meal” that is sold as an ingredient for animal feed, fertilizer, bio-plastics, and bio-diesel production.

In an article published in *Environmental Science and Technology* the authors point out that a potential danger to the human food chain arises from the feeding of feather meal to poultry, beef, pigs, and fish. Its use as a fertilizer may also be a potential danger. Analysis of 12 different samples of feather meal detected the presence of antibiotics in each sample; the number of different antibiotics in a sample ranged from 2 to 10. Also detected in many samples were a wide array of other pharmaceuticals and personal care products, including acetaminophen, antihistamine, mind-altering drugs, sulfonamides, tetracycline, arsenic compounds, caffeine, and drugs which have long been banned for use with animals.

An article in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, explains the rationale for treating poultry with these drugs. Commercial growers raise the poultry under highly over-crowded conditions. These animals are highly susceptible to contagious infection and are stressed, which leads to tough meat; consequently they are treated with antibiotics and tranquilizers. Since tranquilized poultry sleep a lot, the birds are treated with caffeine so that they will feed more and fatten up. They are also treated with growth hormone so that they will grow faster and larger. Even though the birds should no longer be treated directly with a banned arsenic compound (to make the meat look more appealing), this carcinogenic compound is still entering the food chain by way of feather meal.

The most apparent danger posed by these findings is the introduction into the food chain of antibiotics that are known to generate “super bugs”, bacteria that are resistant to the antibiotics now available. Treatment of poultry and livestock uses 30 million pounds of antibiotics annually, accounting for 80% of the use of antibiotics in this country.

The Guardian article advocates stronger regulation of drug treatment of animals, stronger enforcement of regulations, and choosing the more expensive “organic” free range chickens that have been raised without antibiotics and growth hormone and have been fed vegetable foods.

Sources: *The Guardian UK*, 28 April 2012, Pgs. 1-3

Environmental Science and Technology, 46, 2012, Pgs. 3795-3802