

DC Online

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Breastfeeding for Mom's Sake

A new study from rural China concludes that women who breastfeed significantly reduce their risk of breast cancer.¹ A statistical analysis of the 800 women who participated in the study suggests that breastfeeding for two years or more can reduce the risk of breast cancer by 50 percent. The researchers did not find a correlation between the number of infants breastfed and the age of the mother when the feedings began. The World Health Organization recommends breastfeeding at least until age two. Only one third of American mothers breastfeed their children to the age of six months.²

1. *Journal of Epidemiology*, February 2001

2. Associated Press, January 30, 2001.

Breastfeeding for Baby's Sake

A new study of 16,000 breastfed babies concludes that infants should be breastfed as long as practical to improve their overall health. This study compared the times when babies were weaned from breastfeeding. The researchers randomly encouraged some moms to breastfeed longer by enrolling them into a special educational program. The study found a significant decrease (about 40 percent) in intestinal infections and eczema during the first year of life among the group that breast-fed longer.³ Another study published in the Proceedings of *the National Academy of Sciences*⁴ suggests that the CD14 immune cells found in mother's milk stimulate differentiation of immune cells in the infant, leading to an active ramping up of the immune system.

3. *JAMA*, January 24, 2001.

4. *PNAS*, January 18, 2001.

Walking for Atherosclerosis

Researchers from the University of Maryland report⁵ that 30 minutes of walking each day may help decrease an elderly person's risk of stroke. This research measured tissue plasminogen activator (TPA) in the blood of nine volunteers with peripheral arterial disease. The levels of TPA increased by about 25 percent during the exercise, suggesting an improved ability to prevent clot formation. The TPA level increase lasted for about an hour.

5. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, February, 2001.

NSAIDs and Miscarriage

A report in the *British Medical Journal*⁶ suggests a connection between nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) and miscarriages. There has been little research on the subject, but this study concludes that there is a significant increase among women who took the drugs. The study involved more than 18,000 pregnancies, 1,462 of which involved NSAIDs. The researchers did not find any increased incidence of birth defects or pre-term delivery.

6. *BMJ*, February 3, 2001.

Arsenic-Loving Plant

Researchers from the University of Florida at Gainesville report that they have discovered a plant that appears to flourish while absorbing large quantities of arsenic. The brake fern (*pteris vittata*) can soak up 8,000 parts per million of arsenic, suggesting a great way to clean up soil and water pollution. The fern grows wild in California and the Southeastern United States. The poison is concentrated in the fern's leafy fronds, which can grow up to five feet long.⁷)

7. *Nature*, February, 2001.

Bypassing the Brain

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*⁸ reports that many patients who undergo cardiac bypass surgery appear to lose a significant amount of mental power. Five years after the operations, 40 percent of the patients had lost 20 percent of their mental agility. This research looked at 261 patients who were on heart-lung machines during the surgery. Many did poorly on mental tests immediately after the surgery, improved over the following six months, then declined after that. No cause has been pinpointed; in fact, researchers are not even sure the outcomes were directly caused by the surgical procedures.

8. *NEJM*, February 8, 2001.

"Economy-Class Syndrome"

The International Air Transport Association in Geneva is voicing concerns about the possibility of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) among passengers taking prolonged airline flights. No hard studies have looked at the problem, dubbed "economy-class syndrome," but there have been a number of deaths reportedly due to this problem. The theory is that a clot forms during the extended period of inactivity, generally in the lower limbs, which then breaks loose when the passenger begins to move about, as when disembarking. Passengers are encouraged to drink plenty of fluids, wear loose-fitting clothing, and to avoid smoking and alcohol. Some kind of exercise while in your seat may be helpful.⁹

9. Reuters, February 9, 2001.

Super Aspirin Study Outcomes

For the past five years or so, pharmaceutical companies have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to prove that the new "super aspirins" (IIb/IIIa antagonists) are the new wonder drugs for heart and stroke patients. Unfortunately, each of the five major studies thus far suggests that, far from saving lives, the treatment is killing patients. The director of two of the studies estimates that up to 200 patients have died from the experimentation.¹⁰ The patient deaths appear to be related to excessive blood clotting, which is unfortunate, since the drug is supposed to work by blocking the clot mechanism. The prevailing theory of why so many patients die is that the body adapts to the drug's effects by lowering the clotting threshold. When blood levels of the drug become low (for example, just before the patient takes their next dose), clots form much easier than normal.

So far, about 42,500 volunteers have participated in super-aspirin studies. Another study of DuPont's version (Roxifiban) is expected to recruit 2,000 more volunteers by the end of this year.

10. Associated Press, January 27, 2001.

Bigger is Better

A study published in the *British Medical Journal*¹¹ concludes that an infant's weight at birth somehow affects his future mental abilities. Higher birth-weight babies went on to perform better in school than their lighter peers. The study gathered data on nearly 4,000 men and women born in 1946, analyzing results of tests for reading and arithmetic skills, non-verbal reasoning, memory, mental speed and concentration at various ages.

11. *BMJ*, January 27, 2001.

Childhood CT Scans

Radiologists from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center conclude in a study published in the *American Journal of Roentology*¹² that American children get too much radiation from the typical computerized tomography (CT) scan. They say the dosage is probably five times greater than needed to get a quality image, and that the accumulated damage from such exposures might be prematurely killing 500 people each year. It is estimated that CT scans, which make up about four percent of x-ray studies, account for about 40 percent of the average patient's total radiation exposure.¹³

12. *AJR*, February 2001.

13. Reuters, January 22, 2001.

Circadian Rhythms Vary by Organ

A study in *Science*¹⁴ suggests that some organs of the body have their own circadian rhythms

influenced by their function. While light is seen as an important factor for the brain in jet lag, this study of rats suggests that mealtimes can have a profound effect as well on liver function. The upshot of this research is that you might be able to reduce a number of the effects of jet lag, such as stomach upset, by starting to gradually adjust your mealtimes a few days before your flight to coincide with those of your destination.

14. *Science*, January 19, 2001.

Fish and Stroke Protection

Researchers from Brigham and Women's Hospital report the consumption of fish appears to play a significant role in protection from the most common type of stroke. Thrombotic (also known as ischemic or clot-related) strokes occurred 22 percent less often in women who had fish once a week, compared to those who had it less than once a month. The benefit correlated strongly to the amount of fish consumed: those who had five fish meals per week suffered 52 percent fewer strokes. The study involved approximately 80,000 women. Fish consumption had no effect on the incidence of hemorrhagic strokes.¹⁵

15. Reuters, January 16, 2001, reporting on the work of Kathryn Rexrode and colleagues.

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