

## DC Online

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### Vitamin E for the Lungs

Research from Finland suggests that vitamin E offers some protection from lung cancer. Among 29,000 older male Finnish smokers, those with the highest blood levels of alphetocopherol were 19% less likely to experience lung cancer than those with the lowest levels.<sup>1</sup> An earlier study of the same men was not able to correlate vitamin E supplementation with such cancers, but this study compared the blood levels of the vitamin at the start of the study to subsequent development of cancer. The results suggest that vitamin E may offer protection at the developmental stages of lung cancer.

1. *Journal of the American Cancer Institute*, October 1999.

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### ALS Drug Is Not Effective

Researchers at the American Neurological Association meeting in Seattle this past October<sup>2</sup> report that gabapentin, a drug used by about 7,500 patients in the United States to treat amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), is not effective. The drug was no more effective for ALS (commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease) than placebo. The nine-month study found no benefits in muscle strength, breathing ability, muscle cramping, sleep or overall quality of life. The researchers were "crushed"<sup>3</sup> by the results of the study. Gabapentin is taken regularly by nearly one-third of ALS patients in the United States.

2. Presented by Dr. Robert Miller, chairman of neurology at California Pacific Medical Center, San Francisco, October 13, 1999.
3. United Press, October 13, 1999.

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### Social Skills Can Be Depressing

According to a sociologist from the University of New Hampshire,<sup>4</sup> girls who have an early active social life tend to become depressed as adults. The sociologist reasons that these girls develop an emotional reliance on other people, tying their self-image into what others think of them. Education seems to have the opposite effect, producing a sense of independence and achievement.<sup>5</sup>

4. Heather Turner, United Press, December 13, 1999.
5. United Press, December 13, 1999.

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## Mashed Potatoes for the Brain

Canadian researchers report that (mashed potatoes are a good food to serve) to elderly people whose memories are failing. They found a significant improvement in memory recall, lasting about an hour, in such individuals 15 minutes after the meal. The boost comes from a raised glucose level, say the researchers, who chose mashed potatoes for the study because of its speedy digestion. Presumably, a nice piece of cherry pie and a cup of coffee will also work.<sup>6</sup>

6. OTC, reporting on the work of Randall Kaplan of the University of Toronto, October 26, 1999.

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## Too Much Sax Can Be Fatal

The *British Medical Journal*<sup>7</sup> reports that among musicians, saxophone players tend to die quite a bit sooner than other performers. Woodwinds in general seem to be hard on a musician's health, but the saxophone stands out statistically. Researchers hypothesize that the breathing required creates stressful pressures in the neck arteries to decrease blood flow to the brain. Another theory is that the lifestyle of sax players, especially jazz musicians working in smoky bars, puts them at higher risk.

7. *BMJ*, December 18, 1999.

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## Vitamin C for Blood Pressure

Researchers from the Boston University School of Medicine report that vitamin C may be an effective way to lower mild cases of hypertension. Patients lowered their blood pressure by up to nine percent with a daily dose of 500 mg of ascorbic acid. The study was small, involving only 39 patients, but the benefit in the vitamin C group was three times that of those taking placebos. The researchers suspect that the vitamin improves the body's synthesis of nitric acid.<sup>8</sup>

8. *The Lancet*, December 25, 1999.

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## Feeding Tube Problems

A research group from Johns Hopkins University reports in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*<sup>9</sup> that feeding tubes may cause problems in patients, especially when used as an alternative to hand feeding in nursing home patients suffering from dementia. In these patients, the tubes are often inserted through the nose or abdomen to supposedly prevent malnutrition, curtail lung infections from inhaled foods, and relieve suffering. Unfortunately, this study finds that these patients had more lung infections, often became agitated enough to require sedation or restraints, and usually died within a year.

9. *JAMA*, October 13, 1999.

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## Zinc for Children

Research from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore concludes that zinc supplementation in developing countries could save a large number of lives now being lost to pneumonia and diarrhea. This study pooled the results of 10 research projects that looked at the benefits of zinc supplementation in children. They found that after two weeks of the mineral being added to a child's diet, pneumonia incidence was reduced by 41 percent and diarrhea was cut back by 25 percent. No other available intervention produces as much protection against pneumonia for these children.<sup>10</sup> The effect is assumed by the researchers to be due to restoring a normal amount of the mineral to a deficient diet, as opposed to any kind of therapeutic effect of high doses of zinc in the blood.

10. *Pediatrics*, December 1999.

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## Tea for the Heart

A new study from the Netherlands concludes that one or two cups of tea each day helps protect against atherosclerosis. The effect was especially evident in women. Among the nearly 3,500 people who participated, the tea drinkers were 46 percent less likely to develop severe aortic atherosclerosis; if they drank four cups per day, the risk dropped by 69 percent.<sup>11</sup> The benefit may be derived from the effect of antioxidant flavonoids. The authors of the study note that the results may be somewhat skewed by their observation that tea drinkers tend to live healthier lifestyles.

11. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, October 11, 1999.

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## Antibiotics and Pyloric Stenosis

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that use of the common antibiotic erythromycin in newborns has been strongly linked to the development of pyloric stenosis. The condition causes projectile vomiting and blocks the intestinal tract; it is usually treated with surgery. The link was discovered at a Knoxville hospital in February 1999, when 200 newborns were given the antibiotic as a preventive treatment after being exposed to a hospital worker with whooping cough. Seven of the infants developed pyloric stenosis.<sup>12</sup>

12. Associated Press, December 17, 1999.

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## Professional Health Habits

A survey<sup>13</sup> conducted by AllHerb.com finds some interesting statistics related to the health habits of various professionals. The survey involved 1,357 Americans and forms the following generalizations:

- Accountants were seven times more likely than auto mechanics to order a red meat meal at a restaurant.

- Clergymen were most likely to be smokers, followed by doctors.
- Construction workers smoked the least. They were also twice as likely to lie to avoid a shot than teachers.
- Teachers were three times as likely to have an ulcer as computer programmers.
- Computer technicians in general were most likely to weigh the most, followed by doctors and police officers.
- Sixty-eight percent of doctors said they had not exercised in the last 12 months.
- McDonald's store managers exercised the most.

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### Patients Not Informed

Research from the University of Washington in Seattle concludes that 90 percent of the decisions made during a patient's routine visit with a doctor are made without the patient understanding their condition sufficiently enough to choose options intelligently. Analyzing 1,057 audiotaped office visits, researchers note that patients were not told of the pros and cons of procedures, such as lab tests or medication changes. The patients were often not given an opportunity to enquire about their treatment. The study was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.<sup>14</sup>

14. *JAMA*, December 22, 1999.

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