

## DC Online

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### Girls Make Moms Sick

Research from Stockholm suggests that pregnant women suffer more morning sickness when carrying baby girls than boys. Researchers compared the frequency of hospitalizations for extreme morning sickness to the sex of the babies they were carrying and found that most of the babies were girls.<sup>1</sup> The researchers suspect the cause is from higher levels of human chorionic gonadotropin. These findings support previous assertions by Hippocrates that girl fetuses tend to impart a pale face to their mothers.

1. *Lancet*, December 11, 1999.

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### Daily Activities Easier After Weight Loss

A four-year study of 40,000 middle-aged to elderly nurses reveals (if you didn't already know) that a modest weight loss will make a noticeable improvement in a person's quality of life. Fewer aches and pains, increased agility and ease of certain activities, such as climbing stairs, along with higher self-esteem are some of the benefits noted.<sup>2</sup> This study, done at Brigham and Women's hospital in Boston, is one of the few to show how excess weight loss can benefit people immediately.

2. *JAMA*, December 8, 1999.

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### Elderly Breast Cancer Screenings

An epidemiologist from the University of California in San Francisco reports that benefits from mammography screenings in women above age 69 probably aren't worth the trouble. A computer analysis of statistical information suggests that these screenings will add only two-and-a-half days to the average woman's life. This, weighed against the inconvenience and emotional stresses caused by biennial testing, false positives and other factors, makes the benefits doubtful.<sup>3</sup>

3. *JAMA*, December 8, 1999.

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### Reporting Unfit Drivers

The American Medical Association's House of Delegates has approved an ethics code that requires medical physicians to tell patients to stop driving if their condition impairs them enough to be a danger. If they refuse, the doctor is expected to report them to the authorities. This follows five

years of debate on the subject. Opponents protest that this turns medical doctors into police.<sup>4</sup>

4. United Press, December 8, 1999.

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#### Clinton Surprised by Medical Errors

President Clinton, saying that a recent report by the Institute of Medicine was startling to him, announced in December a plan to better monitor medical mistakes. The report said that up to 98,000 Americans are killed each year by medical errors, many of which are caused by flaws in the operation of hospitals, clinics and pharmacies. He said that caregivers must own up to mistakes and develop better quality control and mistake-monitoring systems. His plan includes requiring companies that insure federal workers to institute quality improvement and patient safety measures. A representative from the AMA promised the organization would work with the government to study the causes of physician errors and ways to prevent them. However, the representative believes the death rate is low, given the complexity of the American medical system.<sup>5</sup>

5. Associated Press, December 7, 1999.

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#### Fill up on Oatmeal

Researchers in Charleston, South Carolina report that oatmeal is a good breakfast item if you want to lose weight. They found that people who ate oatmeal felt satisfied longer and consumed less at lunchtime than those who partook of an equal number of calories in the form of sugared corn flakes.<sup>6</sup> The effect was greatest in overweight people.

6. United Press, reporting on the work of Allan Geliebter of New York Obesity Research Center at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital in Charleston, SC.

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#### Gum Disease from the Pill

A report in *New Scientist*<sup>7</sup> concludes that oral contraceptives greatly increase the risk of gingivitis. In a small study of 49 women, researchers found a 32 percent higher rate of gum disease in women who had used contraceptives for up to four years. The average gap in these women between the gum and tooth was 2.4 times larger than in women who did not use the pill. The problem was more pronounced in women who neglected dental hygiene. The authors of this study suspect that hormones in the pill increase inflammation, and that more damage occurs over a longer time period.

7. *New Scientist*, November 1999.

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#### Painkillers and Heartburn

New research from the University of Georgia suggests that nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

(NSAIDs such as aspirin, ibuprofen and others) may increase the likelihood that a patient will suffer from heartburn. Researchers compared 12,500 Medicaid patients who regularly took such drugs with a similarly matched group that didn't. Patients on NSAIDs were twice as likely to have been diagnosed with gastroesophageal reflux disease.<sup>8</sup> Many NSAIDs have been associated with a number of gastrointestinal disorders and are blamed for the deaths of 16,500 Americans each year.<sup>9</sup>

8. Presented to the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists meeting in New Orleans by Jeffrey Kotzan, November 17, 1999.

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### Cardiac Arrest Locations of Choice

A medical physician from the Medical College of Virginia says that if you must have a cardiac arrest, you will survive better at some airports or casinos than in a hospital.<sup>10</sup> The reason, she said, is because such places now keep automatic defibrillators on hand for such emergencies and are training staff on their use. Their average response time in a heart attack emergency is about three minutes—two minutes faster than the average hospital's code team. For every minute a patient in ventricular fibrillation has to wait, survival chances decrease 10 percent. A number of airlines are also purchasing the machines for their planes.<sup>11</sup>

10. Dr. Mary Ann Peberdy.

11. Associated Press, November 17, 1999.

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### Shaken, Not Stirred

Canadian researchers report in the *British Medical Journal*<sup>12</sup> that James Bond's preference for a martini "shaken, not stirred" apparently has a health benefit. They say that the antioxidant activity of the drink is increased by this preparation method. The researchers combined a number of martinis, sans olives, with hydrogen peroxide and found that the shaken drinks neutralized oxidation twice as well. The study's authors are not sure of the mechanism behind their findings, but suggest that this might explain, at least in part, how agent 007 stays in such good health.

12. *BMJ*, December 18, 1999.

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### Dying to Lose Weight

A survey published in the journal *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*<sup>13</sup> suggests that the death rate for patients undergoing liposuction (known officially as lipoplasty) is quite high relative to other surgical procedures. The 917 survey respondents reported 95 deaths in about 496,000 surgeries, or about 19 per 100,000 operations. The main cause of death was usually a pulmonary thromboembolism. The generally acceptable mortality rate for elective surgery is 1 in 100,000. The informal survey, faxed to physicians, asked "Please tell us if you know of anybody who has a fatal outcome."<sup>14</sup> One reason for the high mortality rate is thought to be from patients and doctors alike taking the surgery much too lightly. As a whole, cosmetics operations tend to be relatively safe.

This generalization (extended to liposuction, which is not at the same risk level as a nose job or facelift) lulls people into a false sense of security. About three-quarters of those who died had the operation as an outpatient in a doctor's office.

13. *PRS*, January 2000.

14. Reuters, January 19, 2000.

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## Insulin Clots

Research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*<sup>15</sup> suggests that one reason diabetics are prone to heart attacks and strokes is insulin's effect on the clotting mechanism. Doctors from Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston found that people with high blood levels of insulin also have elevated levels of the PAI-1 antigen, known to impair the body's ability to dissolve blood clots. From this it can be hypothesized that a high insulin resistance, which leads to higher blood levels, will allow the formation or persistence of blood clots, making an individual more prone to heart attack or stroke. About 75 percent of those with type II diabetes die from one or the other.<sup>16</sup> The obvious solution? Exercise, which decreases insulin resistance.

15. *JAMA*, January 12, 1999.

16. Associated Press, January 11, 2000.

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