

DC OnLine

Brian Sutton, DC

Caffeine for Radiation

Indian researchers working with mice report that caffeine appears to offer some protection against radiation poisoning. More than 600 mice were exposed to normally lethal doses of gamma radiation. Twenty-five days later, 70% of the mice who had been injected with caffeine (80mg per kg body weight) were alive. All the mice that were not given caffeine had died. It is thought that caffeine neutralizes hydroxyl radicals produced by the radiation.¹

1. *New Scientist*, June 1999.

No More Oral Polio Vaccine?

The oral Sabin vaccine, in use since 1961, has fallen out of favor with U.S. health officials. A CDC advisory committee says that the risks of the vaccine outweigh the benefits, and it is now recommending a return to a Salk-style 4 injection regimen. About eight cases of polio are diagnosed in the United States each year, all of which are known to be caused by the oral vaccine. There are apparently risks in the Salk vaccine as well. Shortly after its introduction in 1955, it induced polio in more than 200 children, killing 11. A defect in the manufacturing process was blamed.²

2. Associated Press, June 17, 1999.

Remember Your Vitamin E

Researchers from the Tegenstrief Institute for Health Care and the Indiana University Centre for Aging Research report that vitamin E seems to be involved with memory function in the elderly. A study of more than 4,800 persons over the age of 60 indicates that persons of that age with poor memories also tend to have a low blood level of vitamin E. Vitamins A, C and beta carotene did not appear to be related to memory in this study. The work is published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*.³

3. *AJE*, August 1999.

FDA Ignores Recommendation of Its Advisory Panel on Flu Drug

The FDA in an uncharacteristic decision has ignored the recommendation of its own advisory panel and approved a new drug for influenza treatment. Relenza, an inhalant drug, was reviewed by a

panel that voted 13-4 against approval. The committee argued that the drug was useless for preventing the flu and doesn't even help very much after symptoms start. Some studies suggest potentially dangerous effects particularly for persons prone to breathing disorders such as asthma. The FDA reportedly approved the drug because, in part, there just aren't many treatments for influenza around. The agency suggests that asthmatics might want to keep a bronchodilator close at hand when using the drug.⁴

4. Associated Press, July 27, 1999.

Cinnamon against E.coli

Microbiologists from Kansas State University report that cinnamon has antibacterial effects and seems to be an effective way to destroy e.coli bacteria in apple juice.⁵ The researchers added cinnamon to room temperature apple juice that had been contaminated with massive amounts of the bacteria, and in three days time, the vast majority of e.coli was eliminated. Previous research by the same group found that the bacteria could also be killed in ground beef and sausage by adding cloves or garlic, as well as cinnamon.

5. Reported to the July 1999 meeting of the Institute of Food Technologists, Erdogyn Ceylon of Kansas State University and associates.

Couch Potato Diabetics

A 10-year study of 40,000 male health professionals by Harvard researchers suggests that physical inactivity is a serious risk factor for type II diabetes. Those subjects spending 40 hours a week or more watching television were twice as likely to develop diabetes. But it's not a matter of couch potatoes being prone to the disorder just because they're obese from a lack of exercise, as the researchers adjusted for risks relating to body mass index and smoking, alcohol, hypertension and cholesterol. According to this research you can stay overweight but still help avoid diabetes by taking a walk instead of plopping in front of the television after dinner.⁶

6. Dr. Frank Hu, reporting to the annual meeting of the American Diabetes Association in San Diego, June 19, 1999.

Red Wine and Immunology

Much has reported on the health benefits of drinking red wine. However, many worry about the effects of alcohol on the immune system. It has long been known that alcohol tends to suppress the immune response. New research from the University of Florida, however, suggests that the alcohol in red wine does not behave in this manner. Researchers studied white blood cell responses to mild infections in alcoholic mice. While they observed suppression in those that consumed ethanol from other sources, those that regularly drank red wine only (as their alcoholic beverage) showed no ill effects. The mice were all given the equivalent of a human's two to three glasses of alcoholic drinks per day.⁷

7. Reuters, reporting on research by Susan Percival of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

Natural Inflammatory Bowel Disease Treatment

Researchers from the University of Iowa report dramatic results in cases of inflammatory bowel disease by using a down-to-earth treatment: parasitic worms.⁸ Six patients who were not responding to drug therapy were given a drink containing eggs of a worm species that passes out of the intestines after several weeks. About three weeks after the treatment, five of the patients had complete relief from their symptoms. The relief lasted for about a month. The researchers believe that the disorder is due to a lack of parasites which disrupts evolutionary immunological balances, leading to an overactive immune system. (I'm sure there must be other explanations as well.)

8. United Press, August 5, 1999, reporting on the work of Joel Weinstock et al.

Cardiac Patients Should Look on the Bright Side

A new study of almost 300 angioplasty patients concludes that a positive mental attitude is important in preventing coronary artery disease. The patients were tested for self-esteem, optimism, and feelings of control over their lives. Those who scored low in these areas were three times as likely to have a new arterial blockage occur (restenosis) six months after their angioplasty than the patients who scored highest. Other factors such as age, education, occupation and race were considered, but none of these correlated nearly as well as mental attitude.⁹

9. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, August 2, 1999.

Exercise Your Brain

Aerobic exercise affects not only your muscles and cardiovascular system, but also your mental capacity, according to research from the University of Illinois.¹⁰ It was discovered in this study of normally sedentary 60-75-year-olds that exercise as basic as a brisk walk boosts the memory and sharpens judgment. The participants gradually increased their exercise routine so that at the end of six months, they were walking for an hour at a time, three times per week. They averaged a 25% increase in scores on tests designed to evaluate their ability to function (mentally) in an independent lifestyle. A similarly matched group of patients that did only anaerobic exercise (such as stretches or muscle toning) showed no such improvement.

10. *Nature*, July 28, 1999.

Contact Lenses and Blindness

Researchers in the Netherlands report that the incidence of the normally rare eye condition microbial keratitis increases dramatically among contact lens users. The condition is an infection of

the cornea that can lead to partial or complete loss of vision in otherwise healthy eyes. Researchers surveyed patients and ophthalmologists across the country about the types of contact lenses worn, how long they were worn, and how often microbial keratitis was diagnosed. They found that soft lenses increased the risk of the condition more than three times compared to the gas-permeable rigid type, but if these soft "extended wear" lenses were worn overnight, the risk rose to 20 times higher. They concluded that overnight wear should be discouraged. Contact lens users as a group face an 80 times higher risk of the condition than nonusers.¹¹

11. *Lancet*, July 17, 1999.

Breast Milk Is Slimming

A German study published in the *British Medical Journal*¹² concludes that bottle feeding infants tends to make the children obese by the time they reach school age. By breastfeeding their children during the first three to five months of life, researchers say, mothers can give their children a 35 percent better chance of avoiding obesity. The longer the children are breastfed, it appears, the less likely they are to be overweight when they grow older. The study involved nearly 10,000 children. The researchers felt that the effect was due to ingredients in the breast milk, not to environmental factors.

12. *BMJ*, July 16, 1999.

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