

DC On-Line (Chiropractic Research)

Brian Sutton, DC

Return of Thalidomide?

Thalidomide manufacturers are making a push to re-introduce the substance that caused widespread birth defects in the early '60s. Thalidomide, sold as a sleeping aid and a morning sickness treatment, was responsible for missing or malformed limbs and organs in newborns whose mothers may have only taken a single dose. It has also been known to cause nerve damage in adults. This time, it's being touted as a near-miracle drug for leprosy, AIDS-related problems, and other devastating diseases. The FDA is currently weighing the perceived benefits against the projected exposure to about 500 pregnancies each year, assuming the most stringent guidelines are implemented. If the agency decides in favor of the drug, it could be available in the United States sometime this year.¹

1. Associated Press, November 13, 1996.

Soy for Hot Flashes

In a small pilot study at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, NC, researchers found a significant reduction in menopausal hot flashes when women supplemented their diet with soy protein. The soy was sprinkled on cereal or mixed with juices or milk. In a presentation to the American Heart Association's annual scientific sessions in New Orleans, a spokesman for the research group noted that Japanese women, who consume relatively high amounts of soy protein, report only one-eighth as many menopausal symptoms as American women. Phytoestrogens are believed to be the component of soy that produces the effect.²

2. United Press, Nov. 10, 1996.

Xylitol for Your Ear

*The British Medical Journal*³ reports that chewing gum containing xylitol can cut the number of childhood ear infections in half. Xylitol is a sweetener found in corn cobs, straw, and birch and maple trees. It is not useful as an energy source to bacteria that cause tooth decay and, apparently, many ear infections. Researchers gave the gum five times a day for two months to preschoolers, who chewed the gum for a relatively short time before disposing of it. Another group was given normal sugared gum to be sure the effects were not simply due to increased ventilation of the Eustachian tubes. While the study was deemed a big success in the earache department, a number of teachers are concerned about the effect the gum will have on the undersides of desks, chairs, and tables.

3. *BMJ*, November 9, 1996.

Side Effect of SIDS Precaution

The anti-SIDS advice to keep sleeping infants off their stomachs is leading to an unexpected complication: misshapen heads. The number of cases of craniofacial deformities referred to St. Louis Children's Hospital increased by a factor of six from 1992 to 1994. Babies are developing "plagiocephaly with synostosis" from sleeping in a position that puts a steady pressure on small areas of the cranium. The deformity is a flattening or shifting of the cranial bones that can affect ear position and neck mobility. When putting the infant down for the night on his or her back, the researchers recommend turning the head to one side, but not the same side every night.⁴

4. United Press, November 7, 1996, reporting on the work of Professor Jeffery Marsh of Washington University in St. Louis.

Small Babies and Cardiovascular Disease

Research of 13,000 English men over a 23 year period⁵ suggests that improper maternal nutrition might contribute to heart disease and stroke in their children as adults. Both risks were higher in babies born at below-normal birth weights. Not only do the mothers-to-be need to eat well during pregnancy and immediately before conception; the researchers believe that, in the case of stroke risk at least, the mother's childhood food intake may be a factor. They found that the incidence of strokes was higher in babies born to mothers with a deformed pelvis. They theorize that the deformity was due to childhood malnutrition, which in turn impairs placental and fetal growth. The same group did a second study in India with very similar results: four times the number of babies weighing 5.5 pounds or less at birth developed heart disease later in life when compared to babies 7 pounds or more.

5. *The Lancet*, November 9, 1996.

Exercise to Prevent Diabetes

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*⁶ watched adults at a high risk of developing diabetes dramatically improve their glucose metabolism through exercise. The volunteers, doing three sets of 15-minute stair climbing four times per week, doubled their cells' ability to store glucose in six weeks. Insulin sensitivity itself improved 43 percent. These subjects were chosen because of their insulin resistance and the fact that their parents were diabetic.

6. *NEJM*, November 7, 1996.

Walking for Your Heart

A new study⁷ of over 84,000 women concludes that a periodic brisk walk is enough to significantly

increase one's cardiovascular health. Researchers found that three hours per week of walking at a rate of about 4 miles per hour reduced heart attacks and strokes by 40 percent over the eight years of the study. Participants in the study were from 40 to 65 years of age.

7. By Dr. JoAnn Manson of Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. The study has not yet been published.

Hope for Hypertension

Medical Researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore, Maryland, have decided that a diagnosis of high blood pressure does not necessarily condemn a person to medication for the rest of their life. In fact, this study⁸ of elderly patients found that 40 percent of them were able to dispense with their medication by making lifestyle changes that they were still maintaining a year later. The modifications they made were losing a mere 8-10 pounds and restricting salt intake, which makes one wonder what is possible with additional methods the chiropractic profession has at its disposal.

8. Presented at the American Heart Association's New Orleans meeting, November 11, 1996, by Dr. Paul Whelton.

State of the Art Health Care?

A survey of 57 teaching hospitals⁹ finds that only one in 14 routinely feeds their patients in a way that meets current guidelines for healthy meals. Researchers compared three daily menus from each hospital against standards set by the National Research Council's Committee on Diet and Health. Four out every five daily meals contained excessive cholesterol; more than half had too much salt. The fat content was too high nearly 40 percent of the time. The study's authors said their findings were "discouraging" in that these institutions, on the forefront of world medical technology, seem to be ignoring health fundamentals.

9. *New England Journal of Medicine*, November 7, 1996.

Buffered Aspirin Also Causes GI Bleeding

People who choose coated and buffered brands of aspirin to protect their intestinal tract may only be fooling themselves, according to a new study from Boston University's School of Public Health.¹⁰ A research project on 1,750 aspirin consumers concluded that normal doses of aspirin, no matter what the form, increases GI bleeding by 300 percent. Higher doses produce much more bleeding. Aspirin produces serious bleeding in about 19 of every 100,000 people who take it each year, according to the study's author.

10. *The Lancet*, November 23, 1996.

Home Births Safe

A series of reports published in the *British Medical Journal*¹¹ suggest that home births are an equally safe alternative to hospital deliveries for a large percentage of women. One doctor who participated in two of the studies says that while pregnancies can have complications, they're not usually so sudden that women should be told not to have their baby at home. "It's unfair and it's unscientific and it's beastly,"¹² he says. Some studies seem to indicate that home births can be safer for low-risk pregnancies.

11. November 23, 1996.

12. Reuter News Service, in an interview with Dr. Gavin Young of Penrith, England.

Young Brains on Alcohol

Alcohol affects children and teenagers differently than adults, according to research at Duke University Medical Center and the Durham VA Medical Center in North Carolina. Their study, done on animals but thought to extrapolate well to humans, finds that alcohol causes learning and other mental problems in adolescents. Alcohol seems to interfere with development of the brain's circuitry, which is not thought to be complete until a person is about 20 years of age. Also, alcohol does not seem to have the sedative effect on teenagers that it does on adults, which permits more consumption.¹³ The authors think that this and future research will support legal prohibitions against underage drinking.

13. Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, November 1996.

Brian Sutton, DC

Manitou Springs, Colorado

Email: BSuttonDC@aol.com

73160.676@compuserve.com

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