

## DC On-Line (Chiropractic Research)

Brian Sutton, DC

### Alzheimer's and Vitamin E

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*<sup>1</sup> reports that vitamin E significantly slows the progression of Alzheimer's disease. The results were so favorable that some researchers question the ethics of extending the study and withholding treatment from the placebo group. The research is sponsored by the National Institute on Aging.

1. *NEJM*, April 24, 1997.

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### How the Pill Clots Blood

A new study<sup>2</sup> from the Netherlands reports on a mechanism for increased blood clot formation (such as deep-vein thrombosis) in women who take oral contraceptives. Apparently, the hormones diminish a woman's sensitivity to activated protein C (APC), a component in the blood responsible for anti-coagulation activity. The study estimated the risk of thrombosis to be doubled among women who take the pill, an amount that closely resembles epidemiological findings.

2. *The Lancet*, April 19, 1997.

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### Magnesium for Migraines

A headache specialist reports that magnesium provided dramatic relief for about 50 percent of his patients during a small study he conducted recently. PMS symptoms also appeared to improve with supplementation. Patients took 384 milligrams of a slow release magnesium supplement daily for three months. The findings were reported at a meeting of the American Academy of Neurology in Boston.<sup>3</sup>

3. Presented by Dr. Alexander Mauskop, director of the New York Headache Center.

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### Carnivorous Microbe

A single-celled, flagellated micro-organism is causing a lot of concern to people around the North Carolina marshlands. The organism, likened to a microbial piranha, is called pfiesteria or "the cell from hell."<sup>4</sup> Pfiesteria secretes a compound that decomposes flesh and acts as a neurotoxin. It leaves waterways filled with dead fish covered with open sores, suffocated as a result of paralyzed respiratory muscles. The organism is thought to feed on blood.

Scientists think that pfiesteria has been around for thousands of years, but that now nitrogen and phosphorus from runoff are causing it to become more virulent. Dozens of people, including fishermen, divers, and researchers report open sores, memory loss and other neurological problems after coming in contact with it.

4. Associated Press, April 16, 1997.

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#### Medication Headaches

A British neurologist Dr. Simon Ellis<sup>5</sup> thinks he has figured out why daily chronic headaches have become epidemic in many industrialized countries. The reason, he says, is overuse of pain medication. Writing in the British Medical Association's *Postgraduate Medical Journal*,<sup>6</sup> Dr. Ellis says that painkillers can turn acute headaches into chronic ones. One way to get rid of headaches that go on for months, he says, is to simply discontinue the pain medication. He thinks that pharmaceutical companies should put a warning on the label that overuse can lead to chronic headache pain.<sup>7</sup>

5. Dr. Simon Ellis, Department of Neurology, North Staffordshire Royal Infirmary.

6. *PMJ*, April, 1997.

7. Associated Press, April 14, 1997.

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#### Pasta for the Colon

A researcher from the University of Florence, Italy, reports that pasta and other complex carbohydrates help protect a person from colon cancer. In his study, rats were fed carcinogens together with a diet of pasta or simple sugars. The pasta group developed half the number of tumors as the sugar consumers.<sup>8</sup> Another study, not yet published, finds that a high-sugar diet leads to an accelerated growth rate of cells lining the intestines.

8. Presented to a meeting of the American Association of Cancer Research, April 13, 1997.

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#### Uneducated Anger

A Harvard Medical School study reports that some heart attacks are related to the victim's level of education. Their study<sup>9</sup> concludes that myocardial infarctions related to episodes of anger are more than twice as frequent among high school dropouts compared to those with at least a small amount of college training. The researchers did not speculate on the reason for their findings.

9. Archives of Internal Medicine, April 14, 1997.

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#### Fish for the Heart

A new study at Northwestern University reinforces the idea that a diet consisting of a reasonable

amount of fish is good for the cardiovascular system. This 30 year study of over 1,800 Chicago men found a 42 percent lower death rate from heart attack in men who ate the equivalent of two fish meals per week. The study is published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.<sup>10</sup>

10. *NEJM*, April 10, 1997.

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#### Side Effects of Contraceptives

A survey released by the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals reveals that a large number of women stop taking oral contraceptives because of the side effects. Over a three year period, about one in six women taking the pill stopped because of problems with weight gain, mood changes, breast tenderness, headaches, and spotting.<sup>11</sup>

11. United Press, March 11, 1997.

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#### New Hair Drug

A drug manufacturer's hope to market to re-grow hair is waiting for federal approval some time this year. The product, called Propecia, stimulated hair growth in 65 percent of the volunteers in a year long study, according to the manufacturer's research spokesman. Interesting to note, though, is that the success rate for the placebo group was 37 percent. Considering this second place but still significant showing, the placebo route may actually be preferable to some men (and their mates) considering the side effects of the drug: loss of libido and difficulty in achieving erections. Propecia is one of those drugs that manufacturers like to market for multiple uses. It's already approved for use in higher doses to treat prostate enlargement.<sup>12</sup>

12. Associated Press, April 24, 1997.

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#### Exercise for the Breast

A Norwegian study<sup>13</sup> has reinforced the list of known benefits of regular workouts. This research involving over 25,000 women concludes that the incidence of breast cancer is affected significantly by the amount of exercise a woman gets. The effect is most pronounced around the time of menopause. A workout of four hours per week was enough to lower the risk by one third.

The study adjusted for a number of factors, including weight and pregnancy history. When you add this to the body of evidence showing benefits in fighting heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and osteoporosis, it makes you wonder why so many people concerned about such diseases refuse to even consider exercise.

13. *New England Journal of Medicine*, May 1, 1997.

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#### Children's Prozac

The FDA is now formally considering approving Prozac for use in children. Prozac advocates say that millions of children and adolescents suffer from depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder and need the drug. Certainly, this would open up a very large market at a time when antidepressant sales are beginning to slow. Some critics though are expressing concerns about the lack of research on the effects on children. Others fear doctors will dispense it for simple moodiness and other typically teenage experiences with a lack of justification similar to the casual attitude so often shown toward Ritalin.<sup>14</sup>

14. Associated Press, April 30, 1997.

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