

"DC" On-Line

Brian Sutton, DC

Stress Promotes Cancer

A small British study¹ finds that women who undergo severe stress are much more likely to develop breast cancer. Females experiencing an acute stress episode, such as a traumatic divorce or a life-threatening confrontation, increased their risk of testing positive for cancer of the breast by about 50 percent during the subsequent five years.

1. Published in the British Medical Journal, December 9, 1995.

US Waters Polluted

An EPA report on the status of the nation's lakes, rivers, and estuaries says that while water quality is not getting worse in America, neither is any progress being made. More than one third of all waterways are reported to be unsuitable for fishing or swimming because of pollution. Most contaminants are sewage and bacteria, fertilizer, toxic metals, oil and grease. Typical sources of the pollution include runoff from farms, industrial waste, and city sewer discharge.²

2. Associated Press, December 14, 1995.

HIV Transmission Threshold

A study³ by the New York State Department of Health finds that the risk of a mother transmitting the HIV virus to her baby can be predicted by measuring the number of viruses in her blood. For each milliliter of blood tested, if the HIV count is below 50,000 researchers say there is only a three percent chance that the baby will test positive after birth; above that level the odds quickly rise to 75 percent. These numbers will likely be revised somewhat in follow-up studies since only 30 women participated in this research. Eight women gave birth to HIV-infected babies; all these women had levels ranging from 95,000 to 850,000. The authors of the work hope such findings will help clinicians decide when it is appropriate (or not) to use drugs such as AZT prenatally.

3. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, December 19, 1995.

Blood Pressure Linked to Cognition

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association⁴ finds that middle-aged men with elevated systolic blood pressure readings are much more likely to have trouble thinking and

remembering things as they age. Researchers following more than 3,700 men since the 1960s found a nine percent decrease in the likelihood of good cognitive function in the men, who by this time were in their 70s, for every 10-point increase in systolic pressure at the onset of the study.

Analysts are looking at this as an effect of high blood pressure on the brain, promoting it as a reason patients should be certain their hypertension is controlled by medication. However, one might point out that one cause of high blood pressure is impeded blood flow to the brain caused by arterial plaquing or vasoconstriction. In this case, slowing the blood flow with medication will worsen the problem. In fact, I wonder how medical management of high blood pressure might contribute to the findings of studies like this.

4. JAMA, December 20, 1995.

Ebola Gone

The World Health Organization announced December 19, 1995 that the Ebola virus epidemic that killed 245 people in West Africa is over. All tests on any remaining suspected cases were negative. What is interesting is that the virus was stopped without vaccines or antibiotics. A somewhat unsettling revelation is that every Ebola outbreak in Africa "is believed to have spread through public hospitals."⁵

5. Washington Post, June 4, 1995, "African State Hospitals Make Viruses, Not Patients, Feel at Home."

Caffeine Impedes Impregnation

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University report that women who consume 300 milligrams of caffeine each day decrease their chance of becoming pregnant by about 25 percent. This amount is present in roughly three cups of coffee or eight cans of caffeinated soda.⁶ Smoking reduces fertility by a slightly lesser amount, according to the authors of the study.

6. American Journal of Epidemiology, December 1995.

Malnutrition Led to Black Death Plague

At least one scientist is blaming poor nutrition for the spread of bubonic plague during the 14th century. Analyzing farming techniques and English crop records of the period, the University of Bristol ecologist⁷ discovered an apparent phosphorus depletion in the soil and consequential deficiency in the produce grown. He reasons that the lack of this nutrient would lead to decreased resistance to disease. As further indicators to support this theory, he notes that wheat yields were falling during the period and that English population had leveled off in the few years just before the plague struck.⁸

7. Ed Newman.

8. New Scientist magazine, December 21, 1995.

Alcohol and Infant Leukemia

A paper published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute⁹ suggests that pregnant mothers who imbibe alcoholic beverages during the last six months of their pregnancy increase the risk that their child will suffer from infant leukemia by a factor of 10. The study was based on data from about 800 children and, according to the writers, the correlation is "very significant."¹⁰

9. Journal of the National Cancer Institute, January 3, 1996.

10. Associated Press, January 2, 1996.

Both Mainstream and Alternative

A publication that is touted as the first nationwide consumer health newsletter to combine "mainstream and alternative medicine" began distribution in January. Articles in the publication are reviewed by an eight-member board of medical professionals, including a former founding director of the Office of Alternative Medicine of the National Institutes of Health. The first issue of Better Ways to Health contains contributions from 25 practicing medical doctors, chiropractors, nurses, herbalists, therapists, and naturopaths. Topics included alternatives to surgery for carpal tunnel syndrome, drug-free muscle pain relief, and nutritional considerations in coronary heart disease.¹¹

11. PR Newswire, January 2, 1996. For information, call 800-527-5636.

Malpractice Awards for 1995

According to Jury Verdict Research, Inc., a private research group, awards to medical malpractice plaintiffs were at a median level of half a million dollars in 1995.¹² Thirty-five percent of the awards were at least one million dollars. These figures are up from the 1994 levels. Only 30 percent of claims filed against doctors result in a payment to the claimant¹³ and of cases that go to trial, 80 percent are decided in favor of the defendant.¹⁴

12. Associated Press, December 27, 1995.

13. According to the Physician Insurers Association of America.

14. According to the Health Care Liability Alliance, a medical lobbying coalition.

The High Cost of Losing Weight

Researchers investigating the price people pay to shed excess pounds found that it costs quite a bit more to lose weight than to put it on. After a 26 week period on supervised diet programs, they calculated that the dieters spent \$54 for each pound lost. However, most of the weight returned during the subsequent four year follow-up period, raising the cost of permanent weight loss to \$286 per pound. You could feed quite a few hungry people for that amount.¹⁵

15. United Press, September 21, 1995, reporting on the work of Dr. Michael Walsh of Columbus, Georgia and Dr. Thomas Flynn of Orange Park, Florida.

Boxing Dulls the Brain

Amateur boxers are prone to some of the same mental impairments seen in professional boxers, according to British Navy medical researchers. A phenomenon known as "punch drunk syndrome" has been observed in the pros, and now similar problems are being seen in amateurs. In this study, the boxers failed to do as well as other sportsmen on tests for reaction time, reasoning, perception, and short-term memory. Also, brain scans reveal blood flow abnormalities suggesting damage from repeated head impacts.¹⁶

16. United Press "Health Notes," September 27, 1995.

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FEBRUARY 1996