

## DC On-Line

Brian Sutton, DC

### Lab Test Therapy

A Toronto study published in the AMA's Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine<sup>1</sup> concludes that many doctors order laboratory tests that they know are medically useless, only for the purpose of reassuring young patients and their parents. Researchers studied the practices of physicians consulted for "growing pains" and found a large number of doctors ordering blood and hemoglobin counts and similar tests for children whose parents seemed reluctant to accept the doctor's assurance that their child was healthy. The doctors almost universally felt that the parent's faith in a negative lab test, apparently any lab test, would allay their fears.

Researchers are concerned though, not only because of the increased cost for a pointless test, but that anxiety might actually be increased in those patients whose tests come back with a not-uncommon false positive.

1. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, October 1996.

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### Contraceptive-HIV Link Published

In the July 15th issue of Dynamic Chiropractic, I reported on an unpublished study that suggested a dramatic increase in susceptibility to the AIDS virus related to progesterone contraceptive use. The study has now been published in Nature Medicine.<sup>2</sup> Monkeys given progesterone were more than seven times more likely to become infected than the control group, apparently because of decreased health of the vaginal lining.

2. Nature Medicine, October 1996.

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### Radiation for Spinal Cord Damage

A study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences<sup>3</sup> describes a study in rats that suggests a benefit of radiation therapy in spinal cord trauma. A single dose of x-ray was administered to a group of rodents that had their spinal cords surgically severed three weeks earlier. The radiation seems to have improved the outcome in many cases. Researchers speculate that the therapy inhibits growth of certain support tissues that could block regeneration.

3. PNAS, October 1996.

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### Lethal Virus Present in Us All

The deadly cytomegalovirus (CMV), a germ frequently blamed for the deaths of many AIDS, transplant, and other immunologically compromised individuals, turns out to be quite prevalent.

According to a recently published paper,<sup>4</sup> we are all carriers. Granulocyte-macrophage progenitors, the parent cells from which macrophages stem, seem to play host to the virus in everyone. CMV, a member of the herpes virus family, has been around for millions of years. In the vast majority of the population the virus is harmless, but in people who have no immunological resistance the body may allow the virus to take over, if something else doesn't first.

4. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, October 1996.

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### Cholesterol Readings Improve with Fitness

In a study of pre-teen girls,<sup>5</sup> researchers have reinforced the idea that exercise is good for the cardiovascular system. This study seems to indicate that higher intensity workouts confer a much greater benefit. The LDL levels of the girls who were involved in sports that required bursts of activity (such as soccer) were much lower than those who simply walked or did mild calisthenics.

5. Pediatrics, October 1996.

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### Pain Drugs May Do More Harm than Good

According to a pain management expert, taking medication for life's common aches and pains may not be a good idea. According to this Stanford University professor,<sup>6</sup> "You do not want to risk your life treating minor symptoms."<sup>7</sup> He says that the "excessive concern with pain relief" produces 10,000 to 20,000 deaths from bleeding ulcers each year in the United States. Pain is a warning signal that should be heeded, not covered up, he says, and notes that medications like muscle relaxers undermine the body's muscle splinting mechanisms that help prevent further injury. What a concept!

6. James Fries, professor of medicine.

7. Reuter New Service, reporting at the AMA's Science Reporters' Conference in San Francisco in September.

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### Apple a Day to Keep Heart Attacks Away

A still-in-progress European study of heart attack risks so far finds (after 17 years) that people who eat fresh fruit daily are 24 percent less likely to die from a heart attack. Strokes decrease by 32 percent. The researchers also found that individuals are 21 percent less likely to die, period (well, in a given year at least).<sup>8</sup> The study is being done by Britain's Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the Medical Research Council. They find their subjects among "health-conscious" individuals gleaned from health food stores and vegetarian societies.

The same researchers also report that the weight of an individual is very closely related to how much meat he consumes.

8. British Medical Journal, September 28, 1996.

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### Estrogen and Moods

More clues to how estrogen affects a woman's mood are reported in a letter published in Nature.<sup>9</sup> Researchers at the Medical Research Council's Brain Metabolism Unit in Edinburgh report that estrogen affects serotonin activity. Higher levels of estrogen seem to produce more serotonin-specific receptor sites in the nervous system, enhancing serotonin's effects.

9. Nature, October, 1996.

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### Cigarettes Stunt Lung Growth

A Harvard University study<sup>10</sup> concludes that the lungs of a growing child do not reach their full potential capacity if that child smokes during the pre-teen and teenage years. As few as five cigarettes a day caused a measurable difference. The effect was more pronounced on girls. The study was done on 10,000 boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 18.

10. New England Journal of Medicine, September 26, 1996.

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### Streptokinase Study Stopped

Streptokinase, a drug used frequently to dissolve blood clots during an acute heart attack, was being tested for its effects on stroke victims, but the study was halted prematurely because of unacceptably high death rates in patients given the drug.<sup>11</sup> This is not too surprising, since a large number of strokes can be traced to blood leakage into the brain and tissues (such as when a blood vessel bursts), when you would hope for an intact clotting mechanism.

11. Journal of the American Medical Association, September 25, 1996.

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### Parkinson's Symptoms Precipitated by Drug

A paper published in Neurology<sup>12</sup> reports that long-term use of the drug valproate seems to cause patients to experience symptoms of Parkinson's disease. The drug is used to treat epilepsy, migraine headaches, and certain psychological disorders. In this study, 89 percent of the subjects taking the drug experienced unsteadiness, slowed movement and speech, cognitive impairment and hearing loss within 12 months of the valproate therapy. After stopping the medication, most of the patients improved after three months.

12. Neurology, September 23, 1996.

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### Osteoporosis Drug Corrodes Esophagus

A drug taken by half a million people trying to prevent bone loss is causing some to lose esophageal tissue. A report in the New England Journal of Medicine<sup>13</sup> says that the drug Fosamax (alendronate) is being taken improperly by many patients. Apparently, you must take it with a full eight ounces of water, eat some food, and not lie down for 30 minutes to prevent breakdown of the esophagus. The problem occurs if the tablet becomes lodged in the esophagus, or if reflux carries the active ingredient back through the cardiac sphincter. The medicine breaks down the protective lining of the esophagus, causing ulcers and epigastric distress among other problems.

13. NEJM, October 3, 1996.

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