

"DC" On Line

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SIDS and Stomach Sleepers

In 1988, the government of Great Britain began to encourage parents to put infants to sleep on their backs instead of their stomachs. This "Back to Sleep" campaign is being credited with reducing crib deaths by 70 percent in that time period.

Medical reasoning as to why stomach sleepers are at higher risk is minimal; some doctors suggest breathing obstruction as a factor, others think heat is not dissipated as well.

To me, the long-term head rotation coupled with an upper cervical subluxation would be a factor worth considering. None of the medical experts seem to be considering this possibility, though.

HIV-Fighting Blood Cells

An article in *The Lancet* describes how a cell produced by the body called CD8-T appears to be able to control replication of the HIV virus. The work was done at the University of California.

In another paper published in the journal *Nature Medicine*, scientists studying a group of African prostitutes at high risk for AIDS (due to exposure and lack of condom usage) have found a number of women who do not appear to be infected with the HIV virus. They have found, however, HIV-specific cytotoxic T-lymphocytes that kill cells infected with HIV.

Researchers suspect that a low-level HIV-1 infection or exposure to a less virulent form (such as HIV-2) may have allowed their systems to build up some kind of immunity. These women are professionals though; don't try this at home.

Relax and Watch the Evening News?

Researchers at Sussex University in London have found that people who watch a lot of negative news shows on television exhibit a dramatic increase in anxiety about their own troubles. Even if the news is about people in far away lands, the emotional impact causes them to dwell on the negative aspects of their own life.

The study involved three types of news broadcasts: negative, neutral, and positive. Researchers noted that when gathering material for the trials, negative news items were disturbingly plentiful.

Midwife or Obstetrician?

Certified nurse-midwives are preferred 40 percent of the time over obstetricians when women are asked to choose their obstetrical care. The study seems to indicate that women who give their care careful consideration tend to select midwives; 67 percent of the midwife group cited type of care as the reason for their selection, as opposed to 25 percent of the obstetrician group. Among the women who chose a medical obstetrician, almost 26 percent said they hadn't considered any other options.

No Side Effects Suggested

Medical doctors who say they don't tell their patients about possible side effects of their treatment because of the "reverse placebo" effect needn't be concerned. The hypothesis that hinting about a possible side effect will take root in a patient's fertile imagination has been debunked by a recent study. Side effects seem to appear at the same rate whether the patient expects them or not. However, the patient may inform the doctor sooner if he realizes that the symptom is related to the medication.

Smoking Makes You Age Faster

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association finds that elderly women who smoke have less strength, balance, and agility than their non-smoking counterparts. The study, done on over 9,000 women, suggests that smokers might feel physically older because of their habit. Some activities evaluated were walking, standing up from a seated position, grasping, and climbing stairs.

Also compared were the effects of chronic alcohol consumption on similar activities. Surprisingly, and for reasons not yet understood, moderate drinkers outperformed nondrinkers in almost all the activities.

Exercise and Aging

A different study of sedentary women has shown that women in the 50-70 age group can become stronger and feel younger by undertaking a weightlifting program. Forty women were studied over a one-year period. At the end of the year, the exercise group showed a 36 to 76 percent strength increase, reported feeling more youthful, and became more active in their lives. Also, the women who exercised showed a one percent increase in bone density while the control group lost 2.5 percent.

Group Petitions FDA to Ban Pedicle Screws

The Public Citizen Health Research Group (PCHRG) has petitioned the FDA in an effort to ban bone screws from use in the spine. The screws, approved for and considered safe only in long bones, are said to double the risk for a second operation compared to spinal fusion without the hardware. A PCHRG report also reports a 33 percent complication rate, including nerve, blood vessel, bladder, and bowel damage.

Editor's note: See "Surgeons Put the Screws to Spinal Patients" in May 6, 1994 issue of "DC."

Breast Feeding is Good for the Nerves

A nine year Dutch study of 526 children concludes that children who are breast-fed for at least three weeks are half as likely to suffer from neurological problems such as incoordination and abnormal reflexes. Other studies have suggested that breast feeding promotes higher intelligence and protects premature infants from brain damage.

Peeling Skin after Sunburn a Good Sign

Recent research suggests that healthy skin that gets damaged by ultraviolet light undergoes a mass suicide that leads to the peeling skin we see after a sunburn. However, as the skin's genetic material becomes damaged by repeated burns, the genes that generate this response are altered and the peeling decreases. This allows the damaged skin to survive, setting the stage for skin cancer.

Decreasing Tylenol Abuse Could Save Lives

A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine concludes that 10 percent of the nation's kidney failure could be eliminated if people were persuaded to avoid overuse of Tylenol and other acetaminophen products. This translates into about \$700 million per year in health care costs.

This follows another highly publicized study that found an elevated incidence of kidney disease among acetaminophen users.

Editor's note: See "AHCPR Guidelines Recommend NSAIDS and Acetaminophen -- but How Safe Are They?" in the Feb. 13, 1995 issue of "DC."

Margarine and Asthma

Researchers in Australia are charging that the increased incidence of asthma there may be related to a recent increase of polyunsaturated oil consumption and the substitution of margarine for butter. Usage of such fat alternatives has increased by a factor of five in recent years. The group suggests that the fatty acids found in margarine are more "pro-inflammatory" when metabolized.

The study also correlates similar patterns in the United States, Britain and New Zealand, countries where asthma incidence has also risen. Some countries in the Mediterranean region, where olive and fish oil is more prevalent, seem to have less of a problem with asthma.

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