

"DC" On-Line

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Palm and Coconut Oils May Be Healthy

A study published in the Journal of Nutritional Biochemistry¹ finds that volunteers who consumed a mixture of palm and coconut oils improved their blood cholesterol ratios. While the total cholesterol level was elevated, only the HDL portion (considered beneficial) increased. Researchers suggest that these tropical oils have been getting a bum rap lately and that they may actually promote good health.

Paranoia about Breast Cancer

Researchers investigating breast cancer awareness of women in their forties have found that the chances of dying from this condition is much less than these women fear. Also, the study² found that they tend to have unrealistic expectations of the benefits of mammography.

When queried about the prevalence and the likelihood of succumbing to the disease, the women's estimates were from 10 to 20 times more pessimistic than current statistics show. More than half (90 percent of whom recently had mammograms) overestimated the medical benefits of routine mammography more than 100-fold. This study would suggest that the breast cancer educational programs aimed at women in recent years have been more than successful.

Antibiotic Resistance Fears Grow

The American Society of Microbiologists have called for a national program of research and education to raise awareness of growing bacterial resistance to antibiotics. A University of Alabama microbiologist³ says that the United States will "pay dramatically"⁴ if action is not soon taken. The problem is known to be growing, but no one really knows how quickly or to what extent. However, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that at least \$4 billion is spent each year treating antibiotic-resistant infections in America.

The task force recommended a number of things that could be done immediately to at least lessen the problem, such as asking doctors working in intensive care units to wash more frequently and to choose organism-specific antibiotics instead of the shotgun-type, broad-spectrum varieties when possible. Another interesting recommendation was to ask patients to stop pressuring their doctors for antibiotics that they do not need (for example, treatment of viral infections), because many doctors apparently cannot turn them down, even when they know better!

Some interesting facts:⁵

- Over 90 percent of staphylococcal strains are now resistant to penicillin and related

antibiotics.

- Resistance in pneumococci, the most common organism in middle ear infections, is increasing rapidly. Resistance was extremely rare before 1987.
- Resistance to vancomycin, "the last weapon available against potentially deadly hospital-acquired infections"⁶ has increased 20 times in five years.
- A Shigella dysentery outbreak that killed 60,000 people in Burundi in 1990 proved to be resistant to most drugs that previously would have been effective.
- Almost half of all antibiotics made are used in farm animals.

Dioxin Distribution

Researchers at the City University of New York have traced the path dioxin takes on its way to the Great Lakes area. They have determined that about half of the compounds originate from incinerators in Florida, Texas, and Utah.⁷ Most of the sources are incinerated medical and municipal wastes. The chemical is carried in vapor and dust particles, then brought to the ground in rain drops to contaminate grass and feed. It then accumulates in fatty tissues of animals such as cattle. Consumption of beef and dairy products is the main way dioxin enters humans.

Carry It on Your Head, Not Your Shoulder

Studies show that African tribal women who carry loads of up to 20 percent of their body weight on their heads burn no extra calories as a result of the burden. Apparently, gait biomechanics are much more efficient when weight is carried in this manner.⁸ It has also been shown that weights up to 70 percent are carried more efficiently in this manner than when using backpacks. I wonder how well they hold an atlas adjustment?

High Fat Diet for Epilepsy

The Ketogenic diet, an old treatment for epilepsy, is growing in popularity among many physicians. Why the high fat, low carbohydrate diet works is not known, but studies done in the 1970s have proven its value.⁹ High fat consumption was first proposed for epilepsy in the 1920s when it was observed that fasting improved the clinical picture for epileptics. However, the advent of anti-seizure drugs lessened popularity of the diet.

Weight gain from the diet does not seem to be a problem, in fact some patients lose weight.

"Devil"-ed Eggs

Driven by the fear of cholesterol in egg yolks, American consumption of eggs has dropped by 25 percent per capita since 1960. Now, some nutritionists are suggesting that eggs may not be as bad as a superficial dietary analysis might indicate. In an average individual, about 25 percent of the cholesterol in the bloodstream comes directly from dietary cholesterol. But decrease the intake, and the liver manufactures more. Increase it, and less is produced in the body. "For the majority of people, taking eggs out of the diet does nothing," says the chairman of a recent American Heart Association conference on the links between diet and cholesterol.¹⁰ It is thought that in a portion of the population, the liver does not properly regulate its cholesterol output. It seems that dietary gurus may have been applying data from this group across the board to the entire population.

A study at Columbia University on medical students consuming low-fat meals found that the addition of eggs to the diet produced three different results in the volunteers' blood cholesterol levels: they either went up, down, or stayed the same. A few years ago, one 88-year-old man who had eaten 25 eggs per day for 15 years tested out at a cholesterol level below 200.¹¹

A few nutritionists are vocalizing the concern that older persons, who may be picky eaters anyway, are being scared away from nutritious meals because of the "cholesterol" word. However, many still maintain that eggs should be excluded from the diet. For example, the chancellor of a medical center in New Orleans recently said, "It's probably prudent not to push eggs. What is the value of eating egg yolks? I don't know of any."¹²

Lung Cancer and Former Smokers

A study of 685 lung cancer patients at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston¹³ has gathered some statistics about smoking and that disease. Patients who smoked comprised 41 percent of the group, a statistic which by itself might lead one to believe that smoking has little effect on lung cancer. However, 51 percent of the group were former smokers, leaving only eight percent who never smoked. The average former smoker had quit six years before, though about one-quarter had stopped smoking more than 20 years earlier. While nearly everyone agrees that you can help yourself avoid lung cancer by kicking the habit, this study suggests that the effects of smoking are not as quickly reversed as some might think.

Smoking in the United States has decreased from 42 percent in 1965 to 25 percent in 1993. About 25 percent of the population are now former smokers.

Different Care for Insurance Patients

A study of terminally ill patients in a hospital intensive care unit¹⁴ finds that patients without health insurance are withdrawn from life-sustaining treatment almost twice as often as privately insured patients. Researchers do not think that this means uninsured patients are getting inferior care, rather, they feel that insured patients, who incur more than twice the charges, are receiving "futile treatment."

The Price of Being First

China is the largest tobacco producing and consuming country in the world with about 30 percent of all cigarettes in the world being consumed there. In 1989, tobacco pumped about \$3 billion into the Chinese economy and in that country. However, the Chinese Academy for Preventive Medicine reports that direct economic losses due to smoking were more, weighing in at \$3.3 billion. Essentially, the Chinese spent more on treating tobacco related health conditions than they made in sales.

Respiratory Inflammation from the Gulf War

A small sampling of Gulf War veterans has found that about 90 percent have a chronic inflammation of the upper respiratory system leading to airway obstructions. Some of the subjects were asymptomatic, but many suffered from shortness of breath, fatigue (caused by sleep apnea) and other symptoms. The inflammation is thought to be caused by the thick smoke produced by the burning Kuwaiti oil fields.

Dental Equipment and Legionella

Researchers analyzing water gathered from drills and syringes in dental offices have found high concentrations of legionella bacteria in 40 percent of the samples.¹⁵ The bacteria, named for the respiratory disorder known as Legionnaire's disease, seems to live and multiply in the water lines associated with dental equipment. Other known breeding grounds include damp places such as shower heads, air conditioners, and hot tubs. Studies in Europe have shown that about 50 percent of dental personnel are infected with a strain of the bacteria, while it is seen in only five percent of the general population.¹⁶ Normally it is associated with a mild respiratory infection unless the host is weakened.

Iron Good for Learning

A study at Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Maryland has found that teenage girls who are deficient in iron, yet not classified as anemic, achieve significantly less on verbal learning tests than similar girls who took 260 mg. iron supplements over an eight-week time period. The pediatrician who undertook the study¹⁷ estimates that 25 percent of adolescent girls in the United States are iron-deficient.

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JULY 1995

