

## DC Online

Brian Sutton, DC

### Flame-Retardant Milk

A report from the Environmental Working Group ([www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)) finds surprisingly high levels of potentially toxic flame retardants in breast milk in a recent study. The group tested the milk of 20 mothers from different regions of the United States, and detected levels 75 times higher than those reported in similar European studies. The bromine-based chemicals are widely used throughout America on items as common as furniture, computers, automobiles, and hair dryers. These chemicals can accumulate in the body over time, particularly with frequent exposure. Many European countries have banned a number of the compounds, due to concerns about their effect on brain development. The levels found in some of the study participants were among the highest ever reported anywhere in the world.<sup>1</sup>

1. Reuters, Sept. 23, 2003.
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### Vitamin D-Deficient Teenagers

Health researchers are reporting that teenagers are becoming increasingly deficient in vitamin D, leading to poor bone development, stunted growth, and susceptibility to fractures. Some suggest that there might also be a link to some chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and blood pressure problems. According to researchers from Boston University, as much as 30 percent of teenagers in the United States may be deficient.<sup>2</sup> The rate may be even higher among African-Americans, whose overall skin coloring slows the conversion of sunlight into vitamin D. A number of factors contribute to this trend, including a lessened likelihood of going outdoors to exercise or do anything at all, and spending more time indoors watching movies or playing video games; when going outside, slathering on the sunscreen, which filters out ultraviolet light, preventing the body from making its own vitamin D; and shunning milk for soft drinks.

1. Associated Press, Aug. 31, 2003, reporting on the work of Dr. Michael Holick of Boston University.
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### Exercise for Hypertension

Japanese researchers report that just a small amount of exercise each week can significantly reduce blood pressure in otherwise inactive patients. They studied 207 sedentary men and women diagnosed with hypertension, (dividing them into four groups) and prescribed varying amounts of exercise with a health club trainer. They found that those who engaged in a total of 60-90 minutes of exercise per week lowered their systolic pressure by 12 points and their diastolic pressure by 8 points. Additional time spent exercising each week did not result in further improvement.<sup>3,4</sup>

1. *American Journal of Hypertension*, August 2003.

2. <http://journals.elsevierhealth.com/periodicals/ajh/issues/contents>.
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### Cardio-Erectile Function

Research from the Mayo Clinic provides additional support of a potential association between male impotence and cardiovascular disease. In a 16-year study of 2,000 men, men who had suffered from heart attacks were much more likely (3.5 times as often) to have reported erectile problems at the onset of the study. Physicians may want to consider evaluating the cardiovascular system when patients ask for sildenafil citrate (brand name: Viagra).<sup>5</sup>

1. Reuters, Nov. 11, 2003, reporting on research by epidemiologist Steven Jacobsen of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.
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### Walk for Breast Cancer

A study from a Seattle research center suggests that a brisk one- or two-hour walk each week may offer a protective effect against breast cancer. Research analysis reported an 18 percent decrease of this type of cancer among walkers. The women in this study were long-term users of hormone pills for menopause symptoms, which were also implicated by this study as a risk factor for breast cancer. Unfortunately, the risk reduction offered by the exercise was not quite enough to cancel out the increased risk attributed to the hormone therapy.<sup>6</sup>

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Sept. 10, 2003.
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### Tai Chi for Immunity

*The Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine*<sup>7</sup> reports in a small study of elderly men and women that the exercises associated with tai chi may boost immune activity. Researchers looked at 36 volunteers, half of whom took a tai chi course three days a week, for 45 minutes each session. After 15 weeks, those who took the course showed up to a 50 percent increase in memory T-cells specific for varicella, the virus involved in chickenpox and shingles. These volunteers also reported a subjective improvement in their well-being.

1. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, September 2003.
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### Skin Cancers May Suggest Other Problems

New research from an ongoing study of postmenopausal women has found that participants diagnosed with common types of skin cancers are more than twice as likely to develop other, seemingly unrelated cancers. Some of the cancers more likely to develop among these patients are malignancies of the brain, breasts, lung, liver, ovaries and uterus. Nearly one in four of the 7,665 women, who at one time were diagnosed with skin cancer, were subsequently diagnosed with another form of cancer. The study took into consideration other risk factors for cancer, such as smoking and weight.<sup>8</sup>

1. [www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/106564008/ABSTRACT](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/106564008/ABSTRACT).

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## AIDS Vaccine Results

An experimental AIDS vaccine has failed to produce any positive benefits in its latest round of testing. Approximately 2,500 drug users in Thailand were the subjects of this study, which began three years ago. Approximately 8 percent of the participants became infected with AIDS, regardless of whether they received the vaccine (produced by VaxGen, Inc.) or a placebo. The results were not unexpected, however, as the company reports that a larger study in North America had already been deemed a failure. The vaccine contained artificially assembled fragments of HIV-like material that developers had hoped would trigger an immune response.<sup>9</sup>

1. Associated Press, Nov. 12, 2003.

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## Stressed Brains

Researchers investigating the effects of continuous stress report that the brain may suffer permanent consequences. In a study of rats, they found that if adolescent rodents were kept alone in cages (something very stressful for a rat), they developed into adults who lacked key proteins for learning and memory, which presumably translated into fewer synaptic connections and a smaller hippocampus brain region. The stress was induced in the rats at an age comparable to the 18-20-year range for humans.<sup>10</sup>

1. Reuters, Nov. 8, 2003, reporting on the work of Susan Andersen of Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass.

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## Tea for HIV

Japanese researchers report that they have found an ingredient in green tea that appears to suppress the spread of the HIV virus in the body. The compound epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG) binds to the CD4 receptor of T-cells, which blocks the HIV virus from its primary attachment site.<sup>11</sup> Investigators found that EGCG bonded with 80 percent of the CD4 receptors in five minutes, and the remainder by 30 minutes. This work was done in laboratory dishes, so further testing in live animals is needed for verification. The researchers warn that drinking a few cups of tea before contact with the virus probably wouldn't provide enough EGCG to make you immune to HIV infection.

1. *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*, November 2003, Vol. 112, No. 5.

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## Aspirin Linked to Pancreatic Cancer

A statistical analysis of 88,000 nurses reveals a correlation between aspirin intake and cancer of the pancreas. The study looked at average doses of aspirin over 20 years compared to the incidence of the diagnosis. The results showed a dose-related increase in the cancer, which kills nearly all its victims within three years. Compared to individuals who did not use aspirin, those who used one to three tablets each week raised the risk by 11 percent, while in the highest-usage group (14 or more tablets per week), the risk was raised by 84 percent.

Almost 31,000 Americans are diagnosed with cancer of the pancreas each year.<sup>12</sup> There are only a

few other known risk factors for pancreatic cancer, including obesity and smoking.

1. Reuters, Oct. 27, 2003, reporting on the work of Dr. Eva Schernhammer of Harvard Medical School, and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

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## Lowering Blood Pressure Lowers Brain Power

Israeli researchers<sup>13</sup> report that elderly patients think more clearly if their blood pressure is above average. Researchers performed cognitive tests on 495 people 70-85 years of age, then compared the results to blood pressure readings. Subjects with normal blood pressure readings - whether on medication or not - performed poorer than those with higher readings. Experts suggest that doctors be careful when considering blood pressure medication, since a higher pressure may be required in many patients (especially the elderly) to get adequate nourishment to the brain. There has been a push in the last few years to encourage doctors to start treating "pre-high-blood-pressure" (120/80) aggressively, but contrary to some medical creeds, it may be possible for your blood pressure to be too low.

1. *American Journal of Hypertension*, October 2003.

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