

## DC Online

Brian Sutton, DC

### Menopause Not So Sweet

A small study of Turkish women suggests that changes associated with menopause may decrease women's ability to taste sweet foods. Twenty women exhibited a lower sensitivity to sugar on taste tests than did men of comparable age. The researchers say most of the women had compensated for the lessened sensitivity by consuming sweeter foods. Salty, sour and bitter taste buds were not affected.<sup>1</sup>

1. *British Dental Journal*, April 26, 2003; [www.nature.com/bdj/journal/v194/n8/index.html](http://www.nature.com/bdj/journal/v194/n8/index.html).
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### Polyp Protection

A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*<sup>2</sup> reports that vitamin D appears to inhibit the development of intestinal polyps. Among the more than 3,000 veterans involved in this study, those who consumed reasonable quantities of milk and fish were 40 percent less likely to develop polyps than those who received little or no vitamin D in their diet. The average amount of vitamin D consumed by the group with fewer polyps was approximately 645 International Units. The researchers did not take into account exposure to sunlight.

1. *JAMA*, Dec. 10, 2003.
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### Air Pollution Bad for the Heart

A study published by the American Heart Association<sup>3</sup> suggests that air pollution causes twice as many deaths from heart problems as it does from respiratory disorders. Researchers say fine particles in air pollution lead to arterial inflammation, among other problems. They also note that inflammation of the lungs due to pollutants can put a strain on the heart, due to elevated pulmonary pressure. A strong correlation to lung cancer was also found in this study, which adjusted for a number of factors, including smoking.

1. *Circulation*, Dec. 16, 2003.
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### Fertility and Lifestyle

Studies presented at a meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine highlighted two factors that decrease a man's fertility: smoking marijuana and being overweight. According to researchers, marijuana not only cuts the concentration of sperm in half, but also triggers a type of hyperactivity that causes them to swim at a feverish rate, then collapse in exhaustion before they can reach the egg.

Excess weight also results in a lowered sperm count and an increased number of abnormalities. The researchers think that a high amount of body fat impedes heat dissipation in the groin (and thus the testicles), which in turn hampers sperm formation.<sup>4</sup>

1. Associated Press, Oct. 16, 2003, reporting on the ASRM meeting in San Antonio.
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### Vision Vitamins

Researchers from Johns Hopkins Medical Association, using data from recent studies involving vitamin supplementation and macular degeneration, have estimated the impact of such nutritional supplementation on the sight of American citizens. They calculate that if all 8 million Americans (55 years of age and older) thought to be at risk for the disease increased their intake of vitamins C, E, beta carotene and zinc, more than 300,000 would avoid vision in the next five years.<sup>5</sup> Details are published in the Archives of Ophthalmology.<sup>6</sup>

1. Reuters, Nov. 11, 2003.
  2. *Archives of Ophthalmology*, November 2003.
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### Exercise Combats Strokes

A review of 23 studies from around the world concludes that the amount of exercise one performs on a regular basis correlates to a reduced risk of suffering a stroke. In general, a moderately active person is 20 percent less likely to suffer from a stroke (or to die if one occurs), compared to those who get little physical exercise. More highly active people increase their protection to 27 percent. A moderately active person, by the researchers' standards, may take a brisk walk for 30 minutes on most days. The analysis was published in the October 2003 edition of *Stroke*.<sup>7</sup>

1. <http://stroke.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/34/10/2475>.
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### Domestic Asthma

A Spanish research team reports a correlation between the development of asthma and working as domestic cleaners. They found that women working as maids suffered asthma at a much higher rate than those in other occupations. In their study group of more than 4,500 women, nearly 600 were domestic cleaners by occupation; approximately 12 percent qualified as asthmatics. The researchers conclude that about 25 percent of the asthma cases they encountered could be attributed to this line of work. They suspect household chemical irritants as the major contributing factor.<sup>8</sup>

1. <http://thorax.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/abstract/58/11/950>.
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### Moms Can Cope

A researcher from the University of Richmond describes an effect he calls "maternal-induced neural plasticity" in the journal *Physiology and Behavior*.<sup>9</sup> He concludes that motherhood produces a resistance to fear and a clearer head when it comes to stressful situations. An earlier study also

suggested an increase in intelligence. These studies were done on rats, but the author is confident the results would also apply to humans. Female rats that had produced one or more litters were braver and more confident when facing unusual situations that others approach with trepidation. The changes appear to be permanent.

1. *Physiology and Behavior*, October 2003.
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### Subliminal Stress

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore report that they have found a good indicator of susceptibility to heart attack. An increase in blood pressure during mentally stressful situations, they say, is a warning sign. The stress is not subjectively apparent and, in fact, there was no correlation between the blood pressure readings and whether the patient thought he or she felt stressed during this study. According to the researchers, the readings are far more reliable as a risk factor than smoking, diabetes, or cholesterol levels. Subjects whose blood pressure rose 20 points during the test were six times more likely to suffer a cardiac incident in the subsequent six years. During testing, the volunteers were asked to identify the color of words flashed on a computer screen, with errors resulting in a "WRONG!" message being displayed as a reprimand. The words themselves were names of colors, such as "green," "blue," "red," etc., but usually displayed in a different color than the name would suggest.<sup>10</sup>

1. Reuters, Nov. 11, 2003, reporting on the work of Diane Becker and associates.
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### Ipecac No More

The American Academy of Pediatrics, in a reversal of traditional policy, now says parents should avoid the use of syrup of ipecac as an automatic treatment for suspected toxin ingestion. The preferred action is to call a poison control center for advice. Some of the side effects of ipecac (drowsiness and prolonged vomiting) can complicate diagnosis, and may interfere with the action of other antidotes. Also, its use does not appear to improve outcomes in a majority of cases. The recommendation is based on a number of studies analyzed by the American Association of Poison Control Centers.<sup>11</sup>

1. Associated Press, Nov. 2, 2003.
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### Sunscreen Deficiency

British researchers say that sunscreens, even when applied correctly, may not protect against skin cancer as much as you think. The fact that you don't burn may make you think they are working, but measurements suggest they are generally not very good at stopping the UVA wavelengths that contribute to melanoma, despite claims to the contrary.

Malignant melanoma has doubled in Britain every 10 years since the 1950s,<sup>12</sup> one of the reasons studies such these are being done. The researchers suspect people are staying out in the sun longer while wearing sunscreen, thinking they are being protected. They still recommend the use of the products, but warn against staying longer in the sun than necessary.<sup>13</sup>

1. Reuters, Sept. 29, 2003.

## Cadmium and Estrogen

Researchers from Georgetown University report that they have discovered a strong relationship between cadmium and estrogen-like effects in animals.<sup>14</sup> In their study, rats injected with small amounts of cadmium reacted in a similar manner to those injected with estradiol, a form of estrogen. That effect was eliminated if estrogen-inhibiting drugs were administered. Female offspring born to pregnant rats that had been given cadmium went through puberty earlier. Cadmium has also been implicated in breast cancer. The metal is common in rechargeable batteries, pigments, solder, air pollution and cigarettes.

1. *Nature Medicine*, August 2003.

*Brian Sutton, DC*  
*Colorado Springs, Colorado*  
bsuttondc@earthlink.net

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