

DC Online

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Artificially Fat

A study from Purdue University is lending some support to the theory that artificial sweeteners may actually promote weight gain. The study looked at the effect of such substitute on rats. The researchers found that the rodents on a temporary saccharin-substituted diet consumed three times as many calories when later presented with a large supply of normal food. Some suggest that the results are due to a confusion of the appetite mechanism. Others say the study is irrelevant to humans.¹

1. *International Journal of Obesity*, July 2004.
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Mobile Phones and Sperm Count

Hungarian researchers say they have some evidence that prolonged use of a cell phone, especially one carried in a pants pocket or a holster, may impact sperm production. The study was small, involving only 221 men, and did not account for a number of possible variables. However, the study has raised some questions and will undoubtedly lead to more research on the subject.²

1. Reuters, June 28, 2004, reporting on the work of Dr. Imre Fejes of the University of Szeged.
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Low-Carb, Low Fertility

Researchers from the Colorado Center for Reproductive Medicine report that a high-protein diet appears to disrupt fertility in mice, suggesting that the findings may extend to humans as well. The study involved two sets of mice: one fed a 14 percent protein diet and the other a 25 percent protein diet. The group consuming the larger protein share had only a 36 percent chance of blastocyst development, while the control group had a 70 percent success rate.³

1. Dr. David Gardner, reporting to a meeting of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology, June 28, 2004.
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Cacti for Hangovers

Research from Tulane University in New Orleans concludes that a dose of prickly pear cactus juice before a bout of minor binge drinking appears to lessen the morning-after effects. This placebo-controlled study reports milder symptoms in the cactus group, as well as 40 percent lower blood levels of C-reactive protein. The study was funded in part by a company that markets hangover prevention formulas.⁴

1. Archives of Internal Medicine, June 28, 2004.
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Cough Drug Ingredients Don't Hack It

Two common cough syrup ingredients are useless in suppressing nighttime coughing in children, according to a study from a Penn State Children's Hospital researcher.⁵ Dextromethorphan (DM) and diphenhydramine fared no better than a placebo in tests on 100 children with upper respiratory infections. Both groups of children improved after treatment, but the researchers attributed this improvement to the natural progression of the infection resolution process, as there was no significant difference between groups. When asked for advice to give parents in a similar situation, the lead researcher suggested that parents might "do things that are harmless, but could help," such as humidification, to take advantage of any potential placebo effect.⁶

1. Ian Paul, writing in *Pediatrics*, July 2004.
 2. Reuters, July 5, 2004.
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Low Blood Pressure and Dementia

Swedish researchers report that patients whose systolic pressure drops over a relatively brief period of time are at risk for developing Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.⁷ They correlated a 15-point drop or more over six years to a threefold increase of such disorders in elderly individuals. The study involved 947 people older than age 74. The lead author specifically notes antihypertensive medicines as one factor in the blood pressure drop and resultant starvation of brain tissue.⁸

1. Stroke, July 1, 2004.
 2. Reuters, July 1, 2004.
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Long Working Hours Lead to Errors

A study of nurses in U.S. hospitals suggests that longer working hours are leading to more medical mistakes. Researchers found that the odds of a nurse dispensing the wrong medication or dosage tripled after she had been on the job 12.5 hours. According to a survey by the University of Pennsylvania, 40 percent of nursing shifts exceeded this length, with the longest being 23 hours, 40 minutes.⁹

1. Reuters, July 7, 2004, reporting on the work of Ann Rogers of the University of Pennsylvania.
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Multivitamin for HIV

A study of Tanzanian women infected with the HIV virus concludes that multivitamin supplements might slow the progression of AIDS, at least in some populations. The study lasted six years and compared multivitamin, vitamin A, and placebo supplements. Seven percent of the multivitamin group developed AIDS, compared to 12 percent of the placebo group. The vitamin group also showed fewer symptoms overall. For some reason, those taking multivitamins plus a vitamin A supplement did not do as well as the multivitamin-only group.¹⁰ Researchers think the results may

not be so dramatic in the United States, where malnutrition is not as big of a problem.

1. *NEJM*, July 1, 2004.
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Vitamins and Asthma

Researchers from the Children's National Medical Center in Washington report a link between multivitamin supplementation in children and asthma.¹¹ It is estimated that half of all toddlers in the United States are getting supplements, many in their infant formula. The researchers also noted an increase in food allergies among children given multivitamins at age 3. The study examined more than 8,000 infants.

1. *Pediatrics*, July 2004.
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Ovarian Cancer Prevention

Research from the University of California¹² suggests that the later a woman has children, the less risk she has of developing ovarian cancer. The likelihood of developing cancer correlated to the age of delivery of the last child: Compared to the risk in women who never gave birth, the risk was 58 percent less for births at age 35; 40 percent less for births before age 30; and 16 percent less for births before age 25. The researchers postulate that the benefit may come from the hormonal flood during pregnancy and/or the "cleaning out" of the uterus during delivery.

1. *Fertility & Sterility*, July 14, 2004.
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Viva the Vino

Scientists from Harvard Medical School in Boston, searching for an ingestible compound that offers a benefit similar to the longevity effects seen in restricted food intake, think they have found it in red wine.¹³ They say that resveratrol acts the same way in fruit flies and worms as dietary restriction, extending lifespan significantly. While food restriction tends to make mammals somewhat lethargic and may decrease fertility, resveratrol seemed to increase the flies' fertility, and their other activities did not appear to be affected. A new study is looking at the effects on mice.

1. *Nature*, Aug. 5, 2004.
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Couch Potato Consequences

A study published in *The Lancet*¹⁴ has found a link between the time children spend in front of the television and a number of health indicators a few years later. Researchers did periodic assessments of 1,000 people until the age of 26 and found that a couple of hours of TV viewing each evening was associated with higher body mass, lower cardiovascular fitness, and smoking. According to their calculations, 17 percent of overweight, 15 percent of raised cholesterol levels, 15 percent of poor fitness, and 17 percent of smoking at age 26 could be attributed to more than two hours of television each evening as a child or teenager.¹⁵ The researchers were not sure if the

inactivity was responsible, if advertisements influenced lifestyle, or if TV watching is just a marker for a different problem altogether.

1. 14. Lancet, July 17, 2004.
2. 15. AP, July 15, 2004.

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