

DC Online

Brian Sutton, DC

Fat Futures

The World Heart Federation, a Geneva-based group, recently issued a warning that children are becoming more at risk for cardiovascular disease. Children are gaining more weight than ever and are developing unhealthy lifestyle habits that will shorten their lives. The group says that a child who is overweight is three to five times more likely to have a stroke or heart attack by age 65. The excess weight is blamed on outdoor activities being replaced by computers and video games, readily available high-calorie foods, poor nutritional planning in school lunches, and a decrease in physical education classes in high school.¹

1. Reuters, Sept. 20, 2004.
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Circulatory Chocolate

A small study from Athens Medical School in Greece reports that dark chocolate appears to exert a rapid, beneficial effect on blood vessels. Using ultrasound exams soon after subjects consumed a 3.5 oz. dark chocolate bar, researchers found an increased activity of arterial endothelial cells. The study was placebo-controlled, and the chocolate and placebo groups were switched on different days to rule out individual variations. The effects of the chocolate lasted for three or more hours.²

1. Associated Press, Aug. 29, 2004.
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Cold Hearts

It has long been known that cold weather tends to increase the incidence of heart attacks, but a new study suggests that this effect occurs mostly in people with high blood pressure. The study, involving 748 heart attack victims, found that the incidence doubled when the temperature dropped below 4 degrees Celsius (39.2 degrees F) in hypertensives. But researchers also found that a simple 9 degree drop in temperature, even on a mild day, precipitated more attacks. The researchers theorize that a temperature drop causes vasoconstriction which raises blood pressure even more, especially in hypertensive patient whose arterioles may be more sensitive to begin with, adding an extra strain on the heart. They suggest that such individuals dress warmly in cold weather.³

1. Associated Press, reporting on research from the University of Burgundy in France (presented to the European Society of Cardiology), Aug. 30, 2004.
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Laziness May Be Worse Than Excess Weight

A report from the University of Florida concludes that you are better off being overweight than underexercised. The study looked at 906 women over four years, examining both weight and exercise habits. The mean age was 58. Analysis of health problems and cardiovascular incidents revealed a decrease in problems in those who were at least moderately active, no matter what weight category they were in.⁴ However, another study published in the same journal concludes that for adult-onset diabetes, weight is a bigger factor. I recommend both: staying trim and exercising regularly.

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Sept. 8, 2004.
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Curry for Leukemia

Studies from Loyola University Medical Center in Chicago⁵ suggest that the spice turmeric might be responsible for the lower incidence of leukemia in Asia than in the West. Laboratory studies show an inhibitory effect on leukemia cell replication, as well as protection against damage caused by cigarette smoke and certain processed foods.

1. Reuters, Sept. 9, 2004, reporting on a presentation to the British charity Children with Leukemia, by professor Moolky Nagabhushan.
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Omega-3 Brain Food

Mouse research from the University of California, Los Angeles, adds support to the theory that omega-3 fatty acids may help combat the deterioration of brain cells caused by disorders such as Alzheimer's disease.⁶ The researchers noted an unexpected, dramatic reduction in lesions normally found in the mice bred to be susceptible to Alzheimer's disease. The researchers were trying to produce mice with the disease for other experimentation, but were getting specimens that were more normal than diseased. Further investigation revealed that the mice had been raised on a diet of soy and fish. After adjusting for other factors and eliminating the high omega-3 diet, the researchers concluded that docosahexaenoic acid (DHA, an omega-3 fatty acid) was responsible for basically ruining their experiment.

1. *Neuron*, September 2004.
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Cold Paralysis

We were taught in chiropractic college that the earliest symptoms of polio are indistinguishable from those of the common cold. Now, researchers from Duke University report that a common cold virus can actually produce a case of polio, under certain circumstances.⁷ The poliovirus must be inhaled or ingested to cause the disease, but the Duke University group accidentally discovered that the common cold coxsackievirus could also cause the disease (at least in mice) by merely injecting the virus. Injection bypassed normal defense mechanisms that would deal with the virus before it could access nerve and muscle tissue, say the researchers, allowing the virus to produce polio. Some are expressing concern that if a few mutations occur, a new type of polio outbreak could take place.

1. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, September 2004.

Polluted Lungs

A new study from the University of Southern California reports a link between lung capacity and exposure to air pollution as a child. Researchers performed annual lung capacity tests on 1,759 children in Southern California, from age 10 to 18. At the same time, data were collected on air pollutants in the same communities studied. At the end of the study, the researchers found that 8 percent of the children who grew up in the most polluted areas had lung capacities 80 percent of normal, compared to 1.5 percent from the cleaner areas.⁸ Nitrogen dioxide, nitric acid vapors, and carbon appeared to have a stronger effect, while ozone concentrations did not correlate with diminished capacities.

1. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Sept. 9, 2004.

Antibiotic Interactions

A report from the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville warns that the antibiotic erythromycin is linked to heart-related fatalities, especially if combined with a number of other common drugs. Taken alone, sudden-death incidents doubled, but interactions raised the risk by a factor of five in this study of 1,476 unexpected deaths. The researchers think that interactions can slow the breakdown of erythromycin, giving the drug more time to disrupt normal heart rhythms. Some of the drugs suspected of interacting are diltiazem (Cardizem, Tiazac, Dilacor), verapamil (Calan, Isoptin), and antifungals containing nitromidazole (fluconazole, ketoconazole and itraconazole). Grapefruit juice also produces a similar effect.⁹

1. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Sept. 9, 2004.

Postsurgical Acupuncture

A study of postsurgical patients reports that acupuncture works better than drugs for the nausea often experienced by patients after a surgery involving anesthesia. The study involved 75 patients and found that two hours after surgery, 77 percent of the acupuncture patients had no nausea, compared to 64 percent of the drug group and 42 percent who received no preventive treatment.

The researchers used an electroacupuncture form of treatment instead of needles.¹⁰

1. *Anesthesia and Analgesia*, September 2004.

Expensive Students

Former Surgeon General David Satcher has released a report which contends that U.S. schools are losing millions of dollars each year in funding because of obesity. The study suggests that obese students miss six times as many days compared to their trimmer peers, which can add up to big bucks when funding is based on attendance. For example, researchers calculate that Los Angeles schools are losing about \$15 million annually.¹¹ Also, it appears that test scores are significantly lower in children who do not exercise or have poor diets. By contrast, students who participate in daily physical education classes tend to have a more positive attitude toward school and earn better grades.

1. Reuters, Sept. 23, 2004, reporting on research by a group called "Action for Healthy Kids."
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Drink to Your Memory

An ongoing study from the University of Texas suggests that one or two alcoholic beverages each day may improve memory performance, at least in elderly women. The participants, whose average age is 75 years, are asked to remember stories, arbitrary numbers and letters, locations of hidden objects, and to perform other similar tasks. So far, the researchers have found that women who drank in moderation did better than the nondrinkers on the memory tests, and also reported experiencing less depression and feeling better about their health overall.¹²

1. Reuters, reporting on the work of Dr. Graham McDougall, associate professor of nursing.

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