

DC Online

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Lymphoma From Arthritis Treatment

The pharmaceutical company that manufactures the drug Remicade has updated the drug's safety profile to warn of an increased incidence of lymphoma as a side-effect of the medication. The drug blocks production of "tumor necrosis factor" (TNF) to decrease joint pain. Unfortunately, usage is associated with a threefold increase in lymphoma in rheumatoid arthritis patients. There have also been some reports of an increased susceptibility to tuberculosis infection and lowered white blood cell and platelet counts.¹

1. Reuters, Oct. 8, 2004.
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Heads Up for Steroid Treatments

After 30 years of using corticosteroid drugs to treat head injuries, medical professionals are being told that they may be causing more harm than good. One of the few studies ever done on the subject has been published recently in *The Lancet*; it reported that more people die within two weeks subsequent to a head injury if given steroids than those given a placebo.² The study involved 10,000 patients and found a 17 percent increased mortality associated with the drugs. Injury severity and promptness of treatment did not affect the outcomes.

1. *The Lancet*, Oct. 2, 2004.
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Clot Risk From HRT

Researchers from the University of Vermont in Colchester are reporting a doubled risk of blood clots in women using a combination of estrogen and progesterone in their hormone replacement therapy regimen. Clots are a concern because of their potential for traveling to the lungs, which can result in death. This placebo-controlled study collected data from 16,000 postmenopausal women during the 1990s. Risk was highest for women who were overweight, older, or had a genetic predisposition. Aspirin usage did not have an impact. The FDA recommends that women on one of these regimens use the smallest dose possible for only a short period of time.³

1. Reuters, Oct. 5, 2004.
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Transfusions Risky for Heart Patients

An analysis of three studies involving 24,000 patients concludes that something about blood transfusions causes a dramatic increase in mortality among acute heart patients. Researchers

found that a blood transfusion tripled the likelihood that the patient would die within 30 days. The reasons are unclear, but some suspect that the transfused blood is lacking in vital substances, such as nitrous oxide, which is a factor in oxygen replenishment.⁴

1. *JAMA*, Oct. 6, 2004.
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Fatigue From Inactivity

A British group studying myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) report that the condition appears to be more prevalent in inactive children. "ME" is similar to, and often used interchangeably with, chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). Researchers followed the medical history of more than 16,000 individuals from birth to age 30, and noticed a higher incidence of the disorder in those who were the least active. Other contributing factors were being female and having a higher social status. They found no relationship to obesity, academic ability, birth order, allergies, or psychological problems.⁵

1. Reuters, October 5, 2004.
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Fast Growth Problems

A study published in *The Lancet* suggests that the growth boost given by enriched infant formulas may not necessarily be a good thing.⁶ Researchers found that the cholesterol profiles of adolescents who had been breast-fed as babies were 14 percent better than the cholesterol profiles of adolescents who were given formula. Those who analyze such statistics say that this would roughly translate to a similar decrease in heart disease risk.⁷ The study involved 216 pre-term individuals.

1. *The Lancet*, May 15, 2004.
 2. Associated Press, May 13, 2005.
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Hazardous Vapors Affect Fetus

Pregnant women who work around solvents and other inhalable chemicals risk a detrimental effect on their unborn children, according to research by Canada's Hospital for Sick Children and the University of Toronto. This study compared 32 children of mothers in such a situation to a control group. The exposed mothers worked around a variety of chemicals such as ethanol, mineral spirits, and acrylic resins. Jobs included medical lab technician, dry cleaner, nail salon attendant, painter, photo lab worker, science teacher, embalmer, and hair stylist. The researchers found that subjects' children, when tested between the ages of 3 and 9, scored lower on language skills, attention, and memory.⁸

1. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, October 2004.
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Mediterranean Diet for the Gallbladder

Researchers examining the benefits of a diet high in vegetable oil, nuts, and fish are reporting a

preventive effect on gallstones. Their study, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, finds a nearly 20 percent protection gained from such a diet.⁹ The study involved more than 45,000 men over about 15 years.

1. *AIM*, Oct. 5, 2004.
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Colic From Smoke

According to a study from Brown University, babies who are exposed to cigarette smoke *in utero* (via a mother who smokes) are about twice as likely to develop colic.¹⁰ Nicotine is thought to be to blame, as it affects the balance of digestive proteins. The study was an analysis of a number of previous works involving thousands of infants.

1. *Pediatrics*, October 2004.
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Walk for Mental Clarity

Reports published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*¹¹ suggest that a daily stroll may help to prevent dementia in elderly

individuals. One study found that men could almost halve the risk if they took a two-mile stroll each day. Another study in the same issue noted that women who exercise regularly have mental abilities typical of those several years younger.

1. *JAMA*, Sept. 22, 2004.
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Drug Usage Decline/Increase

The 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health has found that on average, fewer young Americans are using illegal drugs such as marijuana, LSD and ecstasy.¹² Unfortunately, more are abusing prescription drugs. This survey found that the recreational use of pain relievers and other medications increased by 15 percent from the previous year among those ages 18-25. Presumably, the decrease in illegal drug use was due to increased awareness of the dangers from public awareness campaigns and such. Too bad there are no similar programs for prescription drugs.

1. Associated Press, Sept. 9, 2004.
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Preventing the Flu

In the wake of the recent flu vaccination shortage, medical experts are advising people on steps to take to avoid the flu that sound remarkably like those many of us have heard from our grandmothers. Recommendations include careful hygiene, plenty of rest, a balanced diet, and lots of fluids.¹³ Stress management is also an important factor. Frequent, thorough hand-washing, avoiding crowds and sneezers, and regular exercise are also highly recommended.

1. Associated Press, Oct. 9, 2004.

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