

DC On-Line (Wellness Research)

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Echinacea Is Good Again

A study published in 2005 concluded that the herb echinacea offered no benefit in the prevention or treatment of the common cold. However, a new study suggests that study was flawed and offers evidence that echinacea does indeed offer a benefit. The problem with the earlier study was that it only tested one specific virus, rhinovirus 39, on 339 volunteers. However, there are more than 200 different viruses involved in colds. The new study is a meta-analysis of other studies and suggests that a large number of the non-rhinovirus 39 varieties are indeed affected by the herb. This work finds a 58 percent lowered risk of cold infection for echinacea overall and a reduction of 86 percent when taken in combination with vitamin C. When a cold did occur, the duration was reduced by 1.4 days.¹

1. Coleman C. *Lancet Infectious Diseases*, July 2007. University of Connecticut School of Pharmacy.
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Vitamin D and Seniors' Physical Performance

A study from VU University Medical Center in Amsterdam suggests that a significant amount of the declining physical performance often seen in senior citizens can be attributed to a deficiency of vitamin D. Physical performance in this case refers to things as simple as the time it takes to stand up from a seated position. The research involved nearly 1,000 people aged 65 and up. Almost half of them were determined to be deficient in vitamin D at the start of the study.²

1. *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, July 2007.
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Mouth-Watering Commercials

A study from the University of Liverpool³ finds that television advertisements encourage children to eat more, especially those who least need to: overweight kids. This study exposed 60 children ages 9-11 to typical food commercials interspersed with cartoons. The amount of food consumed was tracked all the while. The researchers found that the commercials stimulated normal-weight children to consume 84 percent more food. Obese children however, increased their intake by 134 percent - more than double. The obese kids also were consistently choosing the highest fat content food available, generally chocolate. The fact that the foods being advertised generally were not available did not seem to dull their increased appetite. They just ate whatever they could access.

1. Halford J. European Congress on Obesity in Budapest, April 2006.
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RSI Prevention

Canadian researchers report they have found a link between repetitive stress injuries (RSIs) at work and a lack of physical activity in one's personal life. Their work is an analysis of more than 58,000 full-time workers from the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey. According to this study, almost 6 percent of Canadians suffer from some kind of upper-body repetitive stress injury.⁴ The research found that more active people were significantly less likely to suffer an RSI even if they participated in more strenuous activities such as tennis and baseball.

1. *Arthritis & Rheumatism*, April 15, 2007.
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DHA for Alzheimer's Prevention

A report from the University of California at Irvine⁵ suggests that docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), a type of omega-3 fatty acid, can interfere with some of the degenerative processes that characterize dementias such as Alzheimer's disease. The study was performed on mice that were specifically bred to be susceptible to Alzheimer's-like degenerations, but the author of the study sees no reason why it would not translate to humans. A new study is now underway to see if DHA might slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease in humans.

1. *Journal of Neuroscience*, April 18, 2007.
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Nicotine Harms the Fetal Heart

Researchers from the Center for Perinatal Biology at Loma Linda University in California report that they have found a sort of "programming of vascular disease" effect of nicotine in unborn offspring. The study exposed pregnant laboratory rats to nicotine and then evaluated their progeny at adulthood. They discovered restricted coronary artery flow in the nicotine-exposed rats, as well as an increased susceptibility to injury. The effect was more pronounced in females for some unknown reason.⁶

1. Reuters, May 1, 2007. Presentation by Dr. Lubo Zhang at the American Physiological Society's 120th annual meeting, Washington, D.C.
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Depressing Medication

The FDA is asking drug makers to expand warning messages they include on popular antidepressant drugs to notify young adults they may experience suicidal thoughts when they start "popping" pills. Currently, the warnings are given for people younger than 18 years, but on advice from FDA experts, the age is being raised to 24.⁷ Drug manufacturers and other proponents still believe that on average, more people will commit suicide if they don't take the drugs than will, due to the short-term increases seen when patients first begin the antidepressant regimen. However, the FDA would like patients and concerned parties to be extra cautious during that time period. It is estimated that about five out of every 1,000 patients will experience suicidal thoughts or behaviors (such as attempting suicide) when they start taking these drugs.

1. Associated Press, May 2, 2007.
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Depressed Bones

Two new studies⁸ report that a class of antidepressant drugs, selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs), appear to lead to bone fragility in the elderly. One of the studies found that SSRI users lost bone mineral content about 75 percent faster than normal. Another found a nearly 6 percent overall decrease in lower spine density in men at an average age of 74. An earlier study⁹ found SSRIs doubled the risk of fracture. This class of drug includes Prozac and the generic fluoxetine. SSRIs inhibit a protein that transports serotonin. Unfortunately, that same protein also is found in bone.

1. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, June 25, 2007.
 2. *Arch Intern Med*, 2007.
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Depressed Neighborhoods

A study of 740 older adults from the Seattle area suggests that the neighborhood in which you live can have some very subtle influences on your mood. This work correlated an area's suitability for pedestrians with depression symptoms. The study found that neighborhoods with sidewalks, safe intersections, stores and restaurants within walking distance to the residences contained men with fewer symptoms of depression. The correlation did not seem to hold true of women, however. But the results for men applied even after researchers adjusted for overall health, income and exercise habits.¹⁰

1. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, April 2007.
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Barbeque and Breast Cancer

Out of the University of South Carolina comes a study¹¹ that concludes that barbequed foods may raise the tendency of a woman toward developing breast cancer. Overall, this study found that postmenopausal women who had consumed more than one meal of smoked, grilled or barbequed meats (excluding poultry and fish, which showed no such correlation) each week throughout their life were 47 percent more likely to develop breast cancer. Those that skimmed on fruits and vegetables raised their risk by 74 percent. The study did not go so far as to actually examine if the cooking process itself was responsible. Other influencing factors could include dietary fat content, lifestyles or other unrelated but concurrent health issues.

1. *Epidemiology*, May 2007.
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Tea for the Skin

Research published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*¹² involving 2,200 adults finds that a couple of cups of tea each day may offer some protection from skin cancer. In general, men and women who had ever been regular tea drinkers were up to 30 percent less likely to develop squamous cell or basal cell carcinoma. The effect was stronger in those who were lifetime tea drinkers.¹³ The benefit is thought to be due to the antioxidant EGCG found in tea.

1. *JAAD*, May 2007.
2. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, May 2007.

Antibiotics and Asthma

Canadian researchers¹⁴ report a significant correlation between broad-spectrum antibiotic use in infants and the subsequent development of asthma in those children. The authors of the study said they were presented with something of a challenge in this study since many children with any respiratory symptoms at all are given antibiotics, presenting the possibility of early signs of asthma skewing the data. They solved this problem by looking at only non-respiratory antibiotic prescriptions. They discovered, in this study of more than 13,000 children, that the chance of asthma developing increased for each course of antibiotic treatment given to the children. Four courses of treatment increased asthma diagnoses by 46 percent. The antibiotic link was especially noticed in children who did not have dogs, which supports older studies suggesting asthma might be related to a lack of immune stimulation in early childhood.

1. *Chest*, June 2007.
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Eat for Strong Bones

A new study is suggesting that calcium supplements are not quite as good as real foods in building strong bones. Researchers from Washington University School of Medicine¹⁵ asked 183 postmenopausal women to document their diets in detail for seven days. The idea was to take a snapshot of their dietary intake and compare that to their bone mineral density. The women were divided into three groups: those that took in most of their calcium from supplements (averaging about 1,030 mg per day), those getting most of their calcium from foods (about 830 mg per day), and those getting a lot of calcium in both ways (about 1,620 mg per day). The last group showed the highest bone density as might be expected, but it turns out that the calcium from foods group had better bone mass than the calcium from supplements group, even though they were consuming less total calcium. The women in the supplement only group also showed lower estrogen levels (by urinalysis).

1. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, May 2007.

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