

## DC Online

Brian Sutton, DC

### Drinking in Moderation

An analysis of relatively recent studies<sup>1</sup> concludes that consuming two alcoholic drinks each day will cut the average stroke risk by 30 percent, compared to no alcohol at all. The benefit is due to a reduction in ischemic strokes, suggesting that alcohol may reduce clots or relax blood-vessel spasms. As is so often the case, however, more of a good thing isn't necessarily better: Five or more drinks raise the risk by 70 percent, and increase the incidence of ischemic and hemorrhagic strokes.

1. *JAMA*, Feb. 5, 2003.
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### Weighty Health Costs

An analysis of health-care costs of 178,000 adults reports that you may be "worth your weight in gold" to your health-care provider. The heavier the patient, the more he or she paid out each year in health costs, with the heaviest forking over an additional \$1,500 on average - about 67 percent more than his or her leaner neighbors.<sup>2</sup> Only 30 percent of U.S. citizens get an appropriate amount of exercise by government standards, a fact that takes a large share of blame for the epidemic of obesity in America.

1. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, January/February 2003.
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### Osteoarthritis and Heart Disease

Research from Finland reports a correlation between the degenerative joint disease in a man's fingers and his likelihood of dying from heart disease. The study involved 7,000 men and women.<sup>3</sup> A diagnosis of the disorder in any one finger translated to a 40-percent increased risk of a heart-related death. Women with multiple sites of arthritic disease in their hands showed a small increase in the likelihood of premature death from a number of causes. The researchers are not sure if the arthritis is directly related to heart disease in men or longevity issues in women, or if it is just incidental to the overall health picture of the patient.

1. *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*, January 2003.
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### Cumulative Concussions

Another study from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center's Sports Medicine Concussion Program<sup>4</sup> reports that a previous history of a concussion dramatically increases the incidence of symptoms related to a new head injury. Among high-school students who had already suffered

three or more concussions, athletes were more than nine times more likely to have symptoms after another trauma (even if only mild). Other studies have suggested slower healing time after successive injuries, and a greater chance of clinical depression in athletes who have incurred multiple concussions.

1. *Neurosurgery*, November 2002.
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### Breast Supplement

The American Academy of Pediatrics is going on record as saying that breastfed infants should now get vitamin D supplements to prevent rickets. Infant formula contains much more vitamin D than breast milk, and there is an apparent resurgence of the condition among babies who have nursed. The problem is that such babies used to get vitamin D from sunshine, but pediatricians are afraid to recommend the "fresh air and sunshine" approach because of fears of skin cancer.<sup>5</sup>

1. *Pediatrics*, April 2003.
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### Sleep-deprived Children

Experts from the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research at the National Institutes of Health<sup>6</sup> are warning that many children are not getting enough sleep, resulting in a variety of problems. The symptoms of sleep deprivation among children include irritability; easy frustration; difficulty controlling emotions; and hyperactivity. These children also are more prone to accidental injuries and poor performance in school. The optimum amount of sleep for children ages 7 through 11 is about nine hours per night. The problem has become worse in recent years because of the increased number of distractions that can occupy children at nighttime, such as Internet surfing, television, e-mail and "instant messaging."

1. Associated Press, Jan. 28, 2003.
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### Sleep-Deprived Women

An analysis of data from a study of more than 120,000 women that began 25 years ago finds that lack of sleep can increase the risk of heart disease.<sup>7</sup> The incidence of heart disease during the study increased as the amount of nightly sleep decreased from eight hours. Five hours of sleep or less produced a 45-percent increase; for six hours, the risk was 18 percent above normal, and seven hours produced a 9-percent increase. Interestingly, nine hours or more of sleep increased the incidence of heart disease by about 38 percent. There are no popular explanations for these findings at this time.

1. *Archives of Internal Medicine* 2003;163:205-209.
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### Sleep-Deprived Linebackers

A study of 52 linebackers in the National Football League found that an abnormally large percentage of them suffer from sleep apnea.<sup>8</sup> One third of the players were diagnosed with the disorder, a rate four times higher than men in their age group. According to the researchers,

linebackers' weight and neck-muscle development contributes to the problem. Some studies suggests that sleep apnea can slow a player's reaction time by 11 percent, prompting some to sleep wearing a forced-ventilation mask.

1. *NEJM*, Jan. 23, 2003.
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### Death by Laziness

According to the World Health Organization,<sup>9</sup> about 1.9 million deaths each year are attributable to not doing much of anything. In developed countries, this makes lack of exercise the seventh leading cause of preventable death. The figures are rather rough estimates, according to the author of the study,<sup>10</sup> but many experts think it is quite conservative.<sup>11</sup> The ranking of inactivity worldwide falls to the 14th leading cause of preventable death, mostly because only a small portion of the world's population is in a socioeconomic position to be sedentary on a routine basis.

1. [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/sgr.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/sgr.htm).
  2. *World Health Report*, November 2002.
  3. Associated Press, Nov. 3, 2002.
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### Fiber and Heart Disease

The risk of cardiovascular disease can be decreased somewhat by the consumption of foods relatively high in fiber, according to a study of more than 3,500 elderly men and women. Researchers estimate that the risk decreases by 21 percent just by adding the equivalent of two slices of whole wheat bread per day to the diet. Dark breads appeared to offer the most benefit of the cereal fiber sources.<sup>12</sup> The subjects were involved in the study for about nine years.

1. *JAMA*, April 2, 2003.
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### Losing Physical Memory

MRI scans of patients with Alzheimer's disease show a dramatic loss of brain tissue over a relatively short period of time. Researchers from the UCLA School of Medicine<sup>13</sup> found a 5-percent annual loss of brain cells in these patients; a control group of healthy volunteers lost only 1 percent. The loss varied by region of the brain: The memory area decreased by as much as 10 percent, while other areas, such as the visual cortex, remained relatively intact. You can view an animation of their findings on the Internet at [www.loni.ucla.edu/SVG/Animations/Disease.html](http://www.loni.ucla.edu/SVG/Animations/Disease.html).

1. *Neuroscience*, February 2003.
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### Refined Complexions

Researchers from Colorado State University in Fort Collins report<sup>14</sup> that refined carbohydrates may have more to do with the cause of acne than chocolate or greasy foods. Their preliminary research data suggests that consumption of such foods start a series of reactions that increase the production of bacteria associated with acne. The researchers point to countries where acne and

processed foods are almost nonexistent, further suggesting a possible link. A research project has been designed and will be undertaken soon to test their theory.

1. Reuters, Dec. 4, 2002.

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