

DC Online

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Hold the Antibiotics

A study from Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle¹ reports that antibiotics given to children suffering from *E. coli* infection may trigger complications that can result in the child's death. (The bacteria, *E. coli* 0157:H7, causes about 73,000 cases of food poisoning in the United States each year.) This study looked at the medical records of 71 children infected. Nearly half who received antibiotics contracted hemolytic uremic syndrome, a complication of the infection that results in kidney damage and blood cell destruction, a significant contributor to death. Among the children that were not treated with antibiotics, the rate of syndrome contraction was about eight percent. The connection to antibiotics, which has been suspected for some time, is thought to be due to toxins being released from the bacteria into the intestines after contact with the drugs.¹

1. *New England Journal of Medicine*, June 29, 2000.

Olive Oil for Sun-Damaged Skin

Japanese researchers report that virgin olive oil appears to offer some protection from the cancer-causing effects of ultraviolet radiation. Hairless mice were given sunlamp treatments three times a week; after each session, some of the mice were covered with olive oil. Eighteen weeks after the project began, those mice not coated with oil, or those that had been rubbed with ordinary olive oil began to develop skin tumors. The mice coated with virgin olive oil took six weeks longer to show any tumor growth, and the tumors were smaller and fewer. The researchers assume the benefit is due to antioxidants in the oil.²

2. *New Scientist*, May 10, 2000.

Recreational Ritalin

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration reports a growing pattern of recreational use of the drug methylphenidate (MPH) among pre-teen and teenaged children. MPH (street names "Vitamin R" and "R-Ball") is favored for its stimulant and psychotropic effects, and is among the top 10 controlled substances most frequently reported stolen each year. The pattern of abuse is found by examining data from emergency room reports, poison control centers, adolescent drug treatment centers, and school surveys. MPH is sold by prescription under the brand name Ritalin.³

3. Associated Press, May 5, 2000. Recreational Ritalin.

The Beer Vitamin

Dutch researchers report that drinking beer may provide cardiovascular benefits not seen with red wine, because of beer's vitamin B6 content. They measured the blood levels of homocysteine and vitamin B6 among men who drank varying types of alcoholic beverages or plain water with their meals. They found that beer drinkers were the only ones who did not experience an increase of homocysteine (linked to heart disease risks) after meals. However, vitamin B6 levels did increase in these volunteers by 30 percent.⁴

4. *The Lancet*, April 29, 2000.

Exercise for Glaucoma

The Glaucoma Foundation reports that regular exercise can help manage glaucoma, a condition that affects three million people in the United States. Recent studies have shown that regular aerobic exercise helps to reduce intraocular pressure, the main cause of blindness from glaucoma. One study suggests that exercise is a viable alternative to medication.⁵

5. Associated Press, June 5, 2000. Interview with Dr. Robert Ritch of the Glaucoma Foundation.<http://www.glaucomafoundation.org>.

New Stroke Therapy

Alabama researchers report that stroke victims can often regain the use of limbs that had been almost completely paralyzed, by increasing reliance on body part. For example, if the left arm had been paralyzed, researchers found that by restraining the right arm, the brain somehow "rewired" itself to give more control to the left arm. Transcranial magnetic stimulation studies found higher rates of brain activity in the affected area as rehabilitation progressed during the study's 12-day course. Patients said that trying to force movement in the affected area was extremely difficult when starting the therapy, but on a random day improvements came suddenly, as if "somebody threw a switch."⁶

6. *Stroke*, June 1, 2000.

Pregnant Women Attract Mosquitoes

Apparently that "special glow" around a pregnant woman is irresistible to mosquitoes. Researchers from the University of Durham in northern England and the Medical Research Council in Gambia report that mothers-to-be are bitten twice as often as other women. They hypothesize that the larger

quantities of metabolites exhaled by expectant mothers, the fact that they tend to perspire more (thus fostering more bacteria growth on their skin) catch the mosquitoes' attention.⁷

7. *The Lancet*, June 3, 2000.

Stinging Nettle for Arthritis

A British study of arthritis sufferers concludes that the stinging nettle plant greatly reduces pain and stiffness in arthritic joints. Researchers gave one group of volunteers the plant to rub around the affected joint once a day; another group was given a similar-appearing (but entirely different) plant as placebo. After one week of treatment, the stinging nettle group reported a significant improvement over the placebo group. The benefits were most dramatic; the patients who reacted to the plant enough to produce wheals (a type of lesion, or welt), which the patients found to be an acceptable side-effect. Most of the patients preferred stinging nettle to their previous medication.⁸

8. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, June 2000.

Infertility and Driving

French researchers, attempting to explain why the wives of cab and truck drivers take longer to conceive, monitored male volunteers with scrotal temperature sensors and sent them on a driving trip.⁹ After two hours, they found that the temperature of the scrotum increased from 93.5 degrees fahrenheit to over 97 degrees. It is thought that sperm needs a lower temperature to properly form, so this study suggests a potential problem for professional drivers, especially those without air conditioning in their vehicles.

9. *Human Reproduction*, May 31, 2000.

Smoked Gums

Smoking is a major cause of tooth loss, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Periodontal disease (deterioration of the gums) is responsible for most of the tooth loss in older persons and smoking is responsible for the majority of periodontal disease, says a report published in the *Journal of Periodontology*.¹⁰ Smokers are affected by gum disease four times as often as nonsmokers. It is thought that smoking decreases blood flow and nutrition to the gum tissues, as well as lowering resistance to bacteria growth.

10. *Journal of Periodontology*, May 2000.

Dioxin and Offspring Sex

An industrial accident in Seveso, Italy in 1976 gave researchers an opportunity to study the effects of Dioxin exposure on the local inhabitants. Researchers recently completed a study that suggests that teen males exposed to dioxin are more likely to father girls than boys.¹¹ Researchers say that the ratio of 346 girls to 328 boys fathered by such males subsequent to exposure is skewed in favor of females. Blood tests on the males showed dioxin concentration equal to that which causes reproductive damage in mice.

11. *The Lancet*, May 27, 2000.

CR Versus CPR

A study from the University of Washington found a higher survival rate in cardiac arrest patients when persons assisting at the scene skipped the usual mouth-to-mouth resuscitation component of CPR and performed only chest compressions.¹² More than 500 incidents were analyzed; about half received only chest compressions. A greater percentage of compression-only patients survived the trip to the hospital, 40 compared to 34 percent. Only 15 percent of the patients given compression survived the hospital stay and eventually were sent home from the hospital, while the standard CPR group survival rate was just 10 percent. The report conjectures that untrained bystanders can perform the compressions well enough to maintain life for a short while (after a brief instruction over the phone by a 911 operator), but are not adept enough to be effective when combining the ventilation portion of CPR.

12. *New England Journal of Medicine*, May 25, 2000.

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