

DC Online

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Depression: Exercise Better than Medication

Scientists from Duke University Medical Center recently compared an exercise regimen to a popular drug (Zoloft) for treatment of depression. This study was a follow-up to a previous four-month study that found little difference between the two types of treatment. The objective in the latter study was to determine long-term outcomes; the patients were checked 10 months after the beginning of the first study. The researchers found that, among the exercise-only group, only eight percent experienced a return of symptoms. In the medication-only group, the percentage was 38.

Interestingly, in the group that both exercised and took the medication, the relapse rate was 31 percent. The researchers have no explanation for why exercise produced better results, or why those on the combination exercise and medication regimen did so poorly. The exercise employed was a brisk 30-minute workout, plus a warm-up and cool-down period three times per week.¹

1. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, October 2000.

Heart Healing and Education

A new study from Duke University reports that in some countries, how well patients fare after heart attacks correlates with education levels. In Italy, Sweden, and Britain, patients with only eight years of education were five times as likely to die within a year of a heart attack, compared to those with 16 years of schooling. The difference was much less pronounced in the United States, Australia and Poland. It is not quite clear how education influences survival, though it may be related to socioeconomic status: managers, in general, did better than clerical workers or homemakers.²

2. Presented to the European Society of Cardiology in Amsterdam, August 27, 2000.

Single Moms and Crib Death

According to a British statistical analysis of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), the syndrome is more prevalent among babies whose mothers are not married. The rate is five times that of babies born to married couples. An increased incidence is also seen, though not to the same extent, when the mother is under 20 years of age; if birth occurred during the winter; or if the baby was a boy. The rate in Britain is 0.45 deaths per 1,000 live births. There is some dispute over the overall rate figures. Some critics note that many deaths are now being listed as "unascertained," which are not counted in

SIDS statistics.³ Including these numbers would raise the rate to about 0.55.

3. Reuters, August 24, 2000, "Single mother babies show higher UK cot death rates."

Rabies Treatment

Researchers from the University of California⁴ say that the rabies vaccine is often overused, with up to 40 percent of the 40,000 shots given each year in the United States being unnecessary. Among 136 patients given the \$1,500 series of injections in this study, 54 didn't need it. The main problem, the authors say, is that emergency room doctors don't wait for the results of observation of the biting animal, which would tell them if the attacking animal was infected with rabies.

4. *JAMA*, August 23, 2000.

Birth Age and Infant Survival

A new study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*⁵ strongly suggests that babies born even a few weeks early are more likely to die within their first year of life. This is causing some concern to researchers, because more and more doctors are scheduling births early (inducing labor or using C-sections) as a convenience. From statistics on 4.5 million births during the 1990s, researchers found that babies born at 34-36 weeks were almost three times less likely to survive a year, compared to full-term infants. Babies born at 32-33 weeks had six times the risk. Deaths were predominately due to infection, respiratory problems and SIDS.

5. *JAMA*, August 16, 2000.

Green Tea against Skin Cancer

Research published in the *Archives of Dermatology*⁶ suggests that green tea has a protective effect against skin cancers. Based on mouse studies, the author suggests that four or five cups a day would be helpful as a preventive measure. He doubts, however, that there would be a significant treatment value after a cancer appears. The active ingredients are thought to be antioxidant polyphenols.

6. *Archives of Dermatology*, August 2000.

Soy Concerns

Two FDA scientists reported to the media recently that there has been some concern about ill effects from consuming large amounts of soy products, particularly in infants. Apparently, the FDA took this into consideration when it decided last year to allow manufacturers to advertise the cardiovascular

benefits of soy. The agency decided that there was insufficient documentation of problems to outweigh the benefits. However, critics worry that a soy component that resembles estrogen might disrupt normal development, leading to infertility, cancers, or thyroid problems.⁷

7. Reuters, August 14, 2000.

Acupuncture for Cocaine Addiction

A study from Yale University⁸ concludes that acupuncture is a highly effective treatment for cocaine addiction. This eight-week study involved 82 individuals addicted to both cocaine and heroin. The participants were given methadone for their heroin addiction, but no medication for cocaine. At the end of the study, just over half of those participants given auricular acupuncture at points specific for addiction tested negative for cocaine. This is compared to nine and 24 percent in two different control groups.

8. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, August 14, 2000.

Exercise for Impotence

A long-term study of 593 middle-aged men suggests that exercise may help prevent erectile dysfunction. The men, who reported no problems at the beginning of the study, were questioned nine years later about their exercise habits and sexual problems. Those who routinely did the equivalent of about a two-mile brisk walk showed half the problems of men who performed no regular exercise at all. More exercise produced even better results, though there were too few subjects exercising strenuously to say how much function could be preserved by an intense training schedule.⁹

9. *Urology*, October, 2000.

Raw Cheese Controversy

A decision by the FDA to investigate the question of whether or not harmful bacteria can be passed on to the population by raw cheeses is worrying many cheese lovers and producers. Traditionally, the aging process has been thought to eliminate harmful bacteria, but the FDA has recently decided to conduct tests of that hypothesis. If the tests show otherwise, the FDA will most likely require that all cheeses be made from pasteurized milk. Opponents say this will produce only bland versions of previously fine cheeses. At least one organization (<http://www.cheesesociety.org>) has launched a petition drive to push for freedom of choice in obtaining raw milk products.¹⁰

10. Reuters, September 18, 2000.

Olive Oil for the Colon

British doctors report that olive oil appears to offer some protection from colon cancer.¹¹ Researchers analyzed cancer rates and diets in different part of the world to draw their conclusions. They found that countries that consume large amounts of meat and few vegetables show high rates of the cancer, but areas where olive oil is popular do not. They believe the effect is because olive oil decreases the secretion of bile acids and also regulates diamine oxidase, an enzyme that influences cell division in the intestines.

11. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, September, 2000.

Prescription-Induced Murder

A North Dakota man is suing the manufacturer of a drug used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) for damages after the drug induced a psychotic episode that led to the death of his daughter. The man, who had been diagnosed with ADHD as a child, began taking the drug Adderall to better cope with college classes. A few weeks later, he killed his 5-day-old daughter and shot himself in the abdomen. After hearing testimony from psychiatric specialists, a judge declared the man innocent of murder because the drug prevented him from knowing what he was doing. The drug labeling warns that it can occasionally cause "psychotic episodes at recommended doses."¹²

12. Associated Press, September 23, 2000.

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