

## DC Online (Research)

Brian Sutton, DC

### Irritable Bowel Treatment Deaths

The FDA is investigating reports that a popular drug used to treat irritable bowel syndrome in women is killing patients. At least five women have died after taking the drug, from conditions listed as side effects. The FDA has already warned doctors that the drug (Lotronex) can cause ischemic colitis and constipation so severe that surgical intervention is required. The drug's manufacturer is currently negotiating with the FDA over how it will advertise the medication to the general public. One item being disputed is the wording used regarding side effects on television ads.<sup>1</sup>

1. Associated Press, October 30, 2000.

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### High School Sports Are Healthy

*The Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*<sup>2</sup> reports that high-school sports programs really do contribute to a healthier outlook and lifestyle among teenagers. This study of over 14,000 teens found that those who participated in team sports were less likely to use drugs, smoke, have sex, carry weapons, or have poor eating habits. The report is an analysis of a 1997 survey of high-school students by the CDC.

2. APAM, Sept. 2000.

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### Mad Cow Disease Transfusions

Scottish researchers report that a new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (the human equivalent of mad cow disease) can be transferred to a patient by blood transfusions. The scientists report that they infected a sheep with mad cow disease by giving it a blood transfusion from an asymptomatic carrier. Presumably, this also means that humans could be infected in this manner.<sup>3</sup>

3. *The Lancet*, Sept. 16, 2000.

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### Weight Gain Inhibitor

A researcher from the University of Wisconsin-Madison reports that a compound called conjugated

linoleic acid (CLA) appears to inhibit fat gain. While CLA is not a slimming agent, his clinical trials found that once the weight is off, you can help keep it off by consuming foods rich in CLAs. Which foods are these? Red meat and dairy products, such as hamburgers and milkshakes, the researcher says.<sup>4</sup>

4. OTC News Service. Report on the work of toxicology professor Michael Pariza, Sept. 19, 2000.

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### Shaken Baby Syndrome

A new 10-year study in Scotland concludes that injuries to children due to violent shaking by caregivers are much higher than previously realized. This report places the incidence at 24.6 per 100,000 children below the age of one year, more than twice the rate previously thought. This category of "nonaccidental head injuries" results in brain hemorrhages, fractured ribs, mental impairments and death (and obviously, spinal subluxations). Although the work was done in Scotland, the researchers believe that similar figures apply to most other areas of the world.<sup>5</sup>

5. *The Lancet*, Nov. 4, 2000.

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### Creatine for the Brain

Research from the University of Kentucky suggests that the food supplement creatine appears to reduce the damage and improve recovery from traumatic head injuries. Rats fed creatine supplements four weeks in advance of head injuries reduced the damage sustained by 50 percent. Lesser improvements were seen as the supplementation began closer to the injury date; a 21 percent improvement was seen if creatine was included in the diet three days before the injury.<sup>6</sup> The CDC says that 300,000 people sustain brain injuries each year during sports or recreational activities.<sup>7</sup>

6. *Anal. of Neurology*, Nov. 2000.

7. Associated Press, Nov. 2, 2000.

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### Bicycle Helmets for Adults

British doctors report that bicycle helmets really do reduce injuries in adult riders for a number of types of accidents. There has been some controversy over their value to adult bicyclists, though protection to children has not been disputed. Children tend to fall directly on their head in bicycle accidents, which often involve just losing their balance and hitting the ground. Adult accidents tend to involve other vehicles or more complex incidents that affect the neck more often, and for this reason a helmet's effect on such injuries has been uncertain. However, this study does suggest that head injuries are a major factor in adult incidents. During a four-year period in England when helmet use increased substantially, adult head injuries decreased dramatically.<sup>8</sup>

8. *BMJ*, Oct. 28, 2000.

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## Playing with Viruses

In the first case of its kind to be documented, a college football team, sick from a food-borne virus contracted from a box lunch the day before, passed the illness to the opposing team while on the field. DNA testing proved that the eleven members of the opposing team who subsequently became ill were infected with the same virus. All 11 were members of the offensive unit, which had dominated the game because of the weakened state of the ill team. Game films later showed players with vomit on their uniforms colliding with opponents, wiping mouthpieces with their hands, handling the football, and shaking hands with their opponents. The writers of the article, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, urge coaches to bench such players and to pay attention to basic hygienic measures such as washing hands.<sup>9</sup>

9. *NEJM*, Oct. 26, 2000.

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## Head Injury and Alzheimer's Disease

Researchers from the U.S. National Institute on Aging Duke University and report a strong correlation between head injuries as a young adult and the development of Alzheimer's disease. The authors of the study<sup>10</sup> have no idea how the injury leads to the neurological deficit later in life, but draw a direct correlation to the severity of the injury and likelihood that the patient eventually will be diagnosed with the illness. Those that had experienced a loss of consciousness or amnesia for less than 24 hours after the injury were twice as likely as the general population to suffer from Alzheimer's disease. For those that lasted 24 or more hours, the risk quadrupled. The study involved over 1,700 veterans; the time between the injury and the development of Alzheimer's disease was about 50 years.

10. *Neurology*, Oct. 24, 2000.

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## Microwaved Prostates

In 1996, the FDA approved the use of microwave devices to relieve urinary symptoms in men with enlarged prostate glands. The treatment is generally considered safe and effective, but there does appear to be some risk. The FDA has received at least 16 reports of men who were injured when the microwaves became too intense or were directed to the wrong location. Injuries include a burned urethra or penis and the development of fistulae. As a result, some men required colostomies or a partial penile amputation. The FDA has e-mailed warnings to health workers, but considers the risk to be very small.<sup>11</sup>

11. Associated Press, Oct. 20, 2000.

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## Over-the-Counter Strokes

A study from Yale University suggests that up to 500 cases of hemorrhagic stroke in the United States each year could be the result of an ingredient found in over-the-counter diet and cold drugs. The compound, phenylpropanolamine (PPA) has been on the market for decades. The side effect first was suspected in the mid-1980s, when journals began reporting cases of women in their 30s suffering strokes soon after taking appetite suppressants. The Yale study is a five-year effort to gather more information to determine if there is indeed a connection. The study finds a significant dose-dependant correlation. The biggest risk appears to be the first time the drug is used.<sup>12</sup> An FDA advisory panel has decided that PPA should not be classified as "safe."

12. Associated Press, October 19, 2000.

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### Anti-Inflammatory Soup

Scientists from the University of Nebraska Medical Centre report that chicken soup really does make sick people feel better, scientifically speaking, that is. They found significant anti-inflammatory activity in a variety of store-bought and homemade soups. The project measured neutrophil activity, which is related to inflammation and mucus production.<sup>13</sup>

13. Reuters, Oct. 17, 2000. Report on the work of Dr. Stephen Rennard and colleagues.

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