

DC On-Line (Chiropractic Research)

Brian Sutton, DC

Baldness and Heart Disease

Researchers from Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston report that there appears to be a link between heart disease and baldness. In a study of more than 19,000 men, they found a 36 percent higher rate of heart disease among those with the most severe forms of male pattern baldness. These men exhibited a receding hairline and a large bald spot at the vertex of the head. Frontal hair loss alone corresponded to a nine percent increase of heart disease.¹ The researchers suspect that testosterone level is the common factor, though others might argue that vascular insufficiency is the link.

1. Dr. Paulo Lotufo, reporting to the annual meeting of the American Heart Association in Dallas, November 9, 1998.

Prostate Health and Diet Linked

A study of deaths from prostate cancer in 59 countries shows a strong link between diet and prostatic carcinoma. Researchers from University of Massachusetts Medical School report that diets relatively high in meats, milk and poultry seem to lead to a greater incidence of prostatic carcinoma than those consisting of grains, nuts, fish and soy. The study was published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.²

2. *JNCI*, November 1998, James Herbert, et al.

Back-Sleeping Infants

The journal *Pediatrics*³ reports that an infant's sleeping position can influence his motor skill development. Stomach sleeping infants tend to be more susceptible to sudden infant death syndrome, but also seem to begin crawling, pull themselves up, and develop other locomotion skills sooner. However, the authors of this report say that the back sleepers will catch up within a reasonable period of time. Apparently, upper body strength is the main attribute affected.

3. *Pediatrics*, November 1998

Chocolate for Longevity

Eating chocolate candies may help prolong your life.⁴ Researchers from Harvard University estimate that people who consume occasional candy bars will live about one year longer than those who avoid such treats. Those limiting themselves to 1 to 3 chocolate candies each month fared the best, showing a 36 percent decrease in deaths. Those with a greater sweet tooth still had a lessened risk, but at only about 16 percent. The authors speculate that the effect is due to antioxidants (phenols) present in chocolate, though many experts take issue with this hypothesis.⁵

4. *British Medical Journal*, December 1998

5. Associated Press, December 17, 1998

Influenza Vaccine and Guillain-Barre Syndrome

Research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*⁶ concludes that there is a relationship between flu vaccines and Guillain-Barre paralysis. Data from hospitals in Illinois, Maryland, North Carolina and Washington suggests a 70% increase in the disorder in persons receiving the vaccine during the study (1992-1994). The syndrome gained notoriety in 1977 after the swine flu vaccination program, when nearly 500 cases⁷ were diagnosed.

6. *NEJM*, December 17, 1998

7. Reuters, December 17, 1998

Drug Safety Agency Requested

Health experts from Vanderbilt and Georgetown Universities are recommending that the U. S. government establish an independent drug safety board to monitor and investigate reports of prescription drug toxicity. The organization would be similar to the one that investigates plane crashes in that after an incident occurred, investigators would recommend actions to take to prevent similar problems in the future. They say that such a task force could help prevent some of the 100,000 deaths by prescription each year in America.⁸ Dr. Sidney Wolfe of Public Citizen says that much of the problem could be avoided if bad medicines were not hurriedly approved for use on the public in the first place.⁹

8. *NEJM*, December 17, 1998

9. United Press, December 17, 1998, "Health Notes"

Cardiac Medication Side Effects

A recent study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*¹⁰ shows an exciting new heart

medication in a different light. Vesnarinone, not yet approved for use in the United States, had shown dramatic improvement in survival rates among patients with congestive heart failure in a small, six-month study. But this study of nearly 4,000 patients concludes that it kills more than it helps. Patients felt better for a few months while taking the drug, but over the course of the study died at a 20% higher rate than those taking placebos. Most of the deaths in the drug group were from cardiac arrest, presumably related to arrhythmia. The study was funded by the manufacturer.

10. *NEJM*, December 17, 1998

Depression-Induced Cancer

A report in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*¹¹ supports previous work suggesting that depression in the elderly increases their risk of cancer. In this study, the correlation appeared when the depression lasted for more than six years. After adjusting for a number of factors, the risk increased by nearly 90% for all forms of cancer. Anti-depression medications did not seem to improve the cancer risk.

11. *JNCI*, December 1998

Reversing Heart Disease

A five-year study led by cardiologist Dean Ornish supports his contention that heart disease can be reversed. He recommends a vegetarian diet with no more than 10 percent of calories from fat; exercise; stress management; and other lifestyle changes. The study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*,¹² reports continuing improvement over the five-year period in the 35 patients following his recommendations. By contrast, those following American Heart Association guidelines and (in some cases) taking cholesterol-lowering drugs continued to deteriorate. Participants in the Ornish regimen suffered half the heart attacks and other adverse cardiac events of the control group.

12. *JAMA*, December 16, 1998

Sunscreen Cancers

Another bit of research is suggesting that sunscreens may not be doing the job people think. In fact, this piece published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*¹³ suggests that sunscreen use may actually lead to skin cancer. This study used the number of moles developing on children as a gauge of cancer risk. Over 600 children (ages 6 and 7) participated in the study.

In geographical areas where the sun's intensity was relatively high, children whose parents slathered them with sunscreens developed twice as many moles as those which never used the lotions. Researchers suspect that sunscreens offer a false sense of security, encouraging people to stay in the

sun longer. An earlier study (mentioned in a previous edition of this column) suggests that wavelengths that trigger many skin cancers are not filtered by most sunscreens.

13. *JNCI*, December 1998

Bladder Treatment

You may have been noticing a lot of television ads promoting new treatments for urinary incontinence lately. Here's one study just published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*¹⁴ they probably won't mention. Researchers from the University of Alabama at Birmingham conducted an eight-week study of 197 women with that problem and found that pelvic muscle exercises are an effective treatment. The exercises worked better than a popular incontinence medication. Using the number of "accidents" as an indicator, placebos led to a 40 percent improvement; oxybutynin chloride resulted in a 69 percent improvement; the exercises resulted in 81 percent fewer problems.

14. *JAMA*, December 16, 1998

Cherry Burgers

Food researchers from Michigan State University say that there is an easy way to make your hamburgers healthier, juicier and more tender -- just add a few cherries. Adding cherries to ground beef retards spoilage and reduces oxidative formation of some carcinogens (heterocyclic aromatic amines).¹⁵ The resulting burger is also lower in fat. Cherry burgers are already on the school lunch menu in 16 states.¹⁶

15. The American Chemical Society's *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, December 1998

16. United Press, December 14, 1998

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