

"DC" On-Line

Brian Sutton, DC

10-Year Warning of Prostate Cancer

According to researchers writing in the British Medical Journal,¹ there is a blood protein that is elevated many years before prostate cancer develops. Prostate specific antigen (PSA) is already known to be elevated when the cancer is active, but this 20 year study indicates that higher levels of PSA can be found in the blood up to 10 years before the cancer is detectable. Prostate cancer is the second most common cause of death in older men.

1. BMJ, November 18, 1995.

Keep Your Ovaries

Post-hysterectomy women are generally prescribed estrogen supplements to lessen the chance of heart disease, known to develop more readily in the absence of estrogens. A new study now says that these medications are a poor substitute for the real thing. Researchers checked over a 1,000 women for 21 years after their surgeries and found that those who had undergone only a partial hysterectomy (keeping their ovaries) fared better when tested for blood pressure, triglycerides, cholesterol, and glucose levels than those on estrogen replacement therapy. Apparently, the difference becomes more pronounced with passage of time.²

2. Presented at the annual scientific sessions of the American Heart Association in Anaheim, California, November 1995.

Female Runners

Government guidelines on physical activity for women underestimate the benefits of "prolonged vigorous exercise," according to scientists at the University of California, Berkeley.³ Comparing women who ran less than 10 miles per week to those running 40 miles, researchers noted that the distance runners had much better cholesterol levels, as well as waists and hips measuring an average of 2+ fewer inches. Statistically, the cholesterol levels would translate to a 45 percent lessened risk of dying from cardiovascular disease, using popular cholesterol-oriented figures. Current guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and the American College of Sports Medicine advocate mild exercise for women.⁴

3. Berkeley National Laboratory scientists Paul Williams and Davina Moussa.

4. United Press, November 20, 1995.

Exercise for High Blood Pressure

Exercise is routinely prescribed for persons with mildly elevated blood pressure, but a new study shows for the first time that persons with more serious hypertension will also benefit. Participants in the project had initial, unmedicated pressures higher than 180 over 110. After starting a usual course of anti-hypertensive medication, half the subjects began regular exercise, gradually working up to a daily 45 minute exercise regimen. At the end of 16 weeks, that group was able to reduce medication by up to 40 percent. The non-exercising participants actually worsened. Cardiac enlargement lessened in the exercising group as well.⁵

5. New England Journal of Medicine, November 30, 1995.

Private Office X-rays Attacked

The chairman of the radiology department at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia is calling for legislation to prevent non-radiologists from exposing, reading, and being reimbursed for x-ray studies. Analyzing Medicare computer records, he found that only 21 percent of privately billed films were read by radiologists. Since radiologists are experts, he reasons, the other 79 percent are endangering their patients' health and probably reaping excessive financial benefits from the "self-referral." He says insurance companies should refuse to pay for untrained (i.e., non-radiologists) doctors such as internists, family doctors, podiatrists, and chiropractors.⁶

6. United Press International, November 29, 1995. "Expert: Keep untrained docs from X-rays."

Omega Eggs

Chickens at the University of Nebraska⁷ are being fed a diet high in flax seed to produce eggs high in omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids are thought to have a favorable impact on cholesterol levels, cardiac electrical function, and neural development in infants. Apparently, the dietary fatty acids go directly into the yolk of hens' eggs, unchanged. The eggs are being fed to student athletes who reportedly like them so much that they are buying extra ones to take home. Results of a study of the eggs' effects on the athletes' blood cholesterol levels are scheduled to be released this spring.⁸

7. The research is being done by poultry nutritionist Sheila Scheideler.

8. Associated Press, October 31, 1995.

The Worst Pesticide-Contaminated Produce

The Environmental Working Group has released a report naming the 12 fruits and vegetables most likely to have high residues of carcinogenic and endocrine-disrupting pesticides. Using data from the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency, the following (non-organically grown) foods made the list: strawberries, bell peppers, spinach, cherries, peaches, Mexican cantaloupes, celery, apples, apricots, green beans, Chilean grapes and cucumbers. By avoiding these crops, the group says, consumers could cut their pesticide exposure in half.⁹

9. United Press, November 21, 1995.

Test Less, Talk More

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, producing a new edition of the Guide to Clinical Preventive Services, suggests that the time and energy spent on many testing procedures would be better utilized by simply talking with the patients. The Guide, which is utilized by many medical physicians and hospitals, recommends against the usual prostate screenings for men and mammograms for women under age 50, as well as routine fetal monitoring. According to one member of the group, "More is not better in terms of screening tests; it's a misperception to consider screening tests to be without risks."¹⁰ The Guide urges doctors to consult with patients more about smoking, exercise, diet, and drug and alcohol abuse instead of basing recommendations on laboratory tests such as cholesterol levels, which may or may not be valid for a given patient.

10. Associated Press, December 15, 1995.

Cerebral Palsy Lessened by Pre-Eclampsia

A report in the Lancet medical journal¹¹ detailing the relationship between chorioamionitis (a prenatal bacterial infection) and cerebral palsy, describes another interesting finding. Researchers found a significant decrease in babies born with cerebral palsy when the mothers experienced pre-eclampsia, normally considered a bad syndrome. No medical treatment was rendered for the elevated blood pressure and blood albumin, so apparently the syndrome itself seems to offer some benefit to the baby. The authors suggested that further investigation was urgently needed. Factors increasing the incidence of cerebral palsy were maternal infections (such as the chorioamionitis) and premature rupture of the membranes.

11. Lancet, December 2, 1995.

Shift Work Stresses the Heart

Researchers evaluating nurses who work rotating shifts have found an effect on their cardiac health. They found a 70 percent increased incidence of heart attacks in this group, attributed to the shift work stress.¹² The study looked at women who worked at least three nights per month for six years or more.

Results were similar to those found in earlier research on male shift workers.¹³

12. *Circulation*, December 1, 1995, published by the American Heart Association.

13. *Lancet*, 1986.

Americans Losing More Sleep

A Gallup survey recently conducted shows a marked increase in sleep problems among Americans in just the last few years. Since 1991, the number of people complaining of sleep difficulties has risen from just over one-third of the respondents to nearly one-half. Chronic insomnia has risen to 12 percent of the population, up 33 percent. A large number of those surveyed believe that it is not possible to be successful in business and get enough sleep.¹⁴ The study was commissioned by the National Sleep Foundation and funded by a pharmaceutical company that manufactures sleep aids.

14. United Press, December 5, 1995.

Pizza Protects Prostate

A six-year Harvard study of 47,000 men has found that those who consume at least 10 servings per week of foods rich in tomato sauce, such as pizza and especially spaghetti, were 45 percent less likely to develop cancer of the prostate gland. One of the researchers, a Dr. Giovannucci, said the effect may be from an antioxidant found in tomatoes called lycopene. Cooked tomato products seemed to offer more protection than raw tomatoes or juice. Also showing a protective effect were strawberries, though researchers could not explain that finding. The study is published in December's *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Natural HIV Suppressors

A number of substances produced by CD8 T-cells have been found to inhibit HIV replication. A paper published in the journal *Science*¹⁵ describes three such compounds, previously known to be involved in inflammatory processes, reacting to the HIV virus in a test tube. Another study published in *Nature*¹⁶ finds that interleukin-16, also manufactured by CD8 cells, slows HIV replication. Studies such as these are raising the hopes of many that natural body responses can be used advantageously to combat AIDS.

15. *Science*, December 1995.

16. *Nature*, December 1995.

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