

## "DC" On-Line

Brian Sutton, DC

### Smoking Risks Include Diabetes

The British Medical Journal reports that smokers are twice as likely to develop adult-onset diabetes. The study performed by the Harvard School of Public Health involved 40,000 men over a six year period.<sup>1</sup>

The smokers averaged about one pack per day and were otherwise relatively healthy.

Moderate drinkers fared much better. It was found that they had a 40 percent less risk of developing diabetes compared to non-drinkers.

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### Colon Cancer Risk Rises with Height and Girth

Harvard University researchers have found that middle-aged and elderly men with large belt sizes run a greater risk of colon cancer.<sup>2</sup> If their waist measurement is 43 inches or more, they are twice as likely to develop the cancer than someone measuring 35 inches or less.

Also, men taller than 6'1" ran a greater risk, though to a much lesser extent.

Exercise seems to decrease the likelihood of cancer, with significant benefits appearing with just one hour of running per week. Men who run four hours or more weekly decrease their risk to one-half that of their sedentary counterparts.

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### Lowering Your Cholesterol Can Be Depressing

Psychiatrists often notice that their patients who are under concurrent medical treatment for heart problems are more prone to episodes of anxiety and crying. A study at the Henry Ford Hospital in Michigan is blaming their emotional instability on cholesterol-lowering drugs.<sup>3</sup>

Researchers are starting to associate artificial decreases in cholesterol levels with emotional stress. Statistically, such patients are more likely to die by murder, suicide, or some kind of traumatic accident.

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### High Heels and Repetitive Stress Injuries

A survey by the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons reveals that podiatrists blame 36 percent of female foot problems on a combination of improper shoe fit and high heels.<sup>4</sup>

Employers often expect women to wear high heels in business environments, not realizing that the long-term repetitive stress on the feet and ankles may actually decrease productivity resulting from the consequential physical problems. Problems cited include: a shortened Achilles tendon; gait instability and torn ligaments; sprains; back pain (from improper posture); jammed toes; bone spurs; bunions and hammer toes; aggravation to ingrown toenails; and neuromas.

The group next plans to try to quantify the actual number of days lost from work because of improper footwear.

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### Indicators of Future Disability in the Elderly

A report published in the New England Journal of Medicine outlines an Iowa study of elderly persons. It was found that those who score low on tests measuring their ability to do simple tasks such as walking, standing up or sitting down are up to five times more likely to become seriously disabled within a few years.

None of the over 1,000 participants could be classified as disabled at the beginning of the study, but after four years nearly 10 percent were so disabled they could not do such things as walk across a room without help, use the toilet, or move from a bed to a chair.<sup>5</sup> The average subject age was 77 at the beginning of the study.

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### NIH Looking at Alternative Medicine

The U.S. Government Printing Office is distributing a federally funded report released on alternative medicine that was requested by the National Institutes of Health. It assesses research that has been done in areas such as manual healing, acupuncture, herbal medicine, biofeedback, and others.

The 370-page book is expected to be used as a guideline for the NIH Office of Alternative Medicine. According to Dr. James Gordon, the chairman of the advisory council guiding the office, the book's purpose is "to say what is known. We're not serving as a board of censorship."<sup>6</sup>

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### Mothers More Prone to Injury in the Workplace

Working mothers with young children at home seem to be at a higher risk for on-the-job injuries, according to a study conducted by the University of California. Mothers in the 30-40 year age group were nearly five times as likely to be injured as other women their age.<sup>7</sup>

No reason for the high injury rate was determined, but researchers speculate that one may be fatigue.

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## High U.S. Infant Mortality May Be Due to Term, Not Weight

The infant mortality rate of Norway is among the lowest in the world. The United States does poorly by comparison. Researchers at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in North Carolina are attributing the U.S.'s poor showing to high numbers of preterm births.

Most previous research attributes the difference to birth weight, but this study took into account the term of the pregnancy. The U.S. preterm birth rate is nearly 50 percent higher than that of Norway, and when you remove those from the equation, there is not much difference in the statistics of the two countries.<sup>8</sup>

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## FDA Warning about Ma Huang and Kola Nut

The FDA has begun warning Americans not to take the Chinese herb called "ma huang" in combination with kola nut. There have been more than 100 reports of symptoms including heart attacks and hepatitis. Several deaths are also being attributed to the combination that was present in a supplement called Nature's Nutrition Formula One.

According to an Associated Press report, the FDA was only issuing the warning because it "does not have the authority to force a product's recall."<sup>9</sup>

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## Smoking, Sleeping, and SIDS

It appears that cigarette smoke proportionately increases an infant's risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). A baby in the average smoking household has a doubled risk of SIDS, and the more smoke present, the greater the risk.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, in households where just one person smoked, the risk was much higher if the smoker was the father as opposed to the mother. In that case, the risk was nearly 3.5 times higher than in a non-smoking household.

This same study also tracked sleeping position, but this time (unlike other recent studies) no correlation was found. Yet, in the same journal, a report from Tasmania noted the steady decline in SIDS since officials there began persuading parents to put children to sleep on their backs or sides.

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## If Vegetables Are Good for You, Would a Vegetable Pill Be Better?

California vitamin companies are beginning to market "vegetable pills,"<sup>11</sup> preparations of phytochemicals such as beta-carotene, indoles, and many other compounds, some of which are not well understood. This is partly in response to research that suggests that they curb the growth of some

cancer cells.

The pills are made by processing various vegetables to remove the fiber and water. Presumably, people will get their required amounts of dietary fiber and water from other sources, perhaps other pills.

### *References*

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*Brian Sutton, DC*  
*Tampa, Florida*  
*Email: GENIE:B.SUTTON1*  
*CompuServe: 73160,676*  
*Internet: B.SUTTON1@GENIE.GEIS.COM*

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