

"DC" On-Line

Brian Sutton, DC

Baldness and Loss of Nerve Supply

Doctors in France are investigating an association between loss of nerve supply and baldness. A patient that had damaged a nerve in a scalp injury prompted a letter to The Lancet¹ that described poor hair growth afterward. The writers cite other studies associating neurotransmitters with proper hair follicle function.

Insurance Self-Regulation

According to the consumer group Consumer Federation of America, almost one in every five persons making laws to regulate the insurance industry is also working for said insurance industry, either as an agent, an attorney, or a board of director for an insurer. In Missouri, "half of the House insurance committee members double as insurance agents."² The director of the federation, commenting on the report, said that the drafting of and voting on regulations affecting one's own financial interests is "more dangerous than illegal gratuities from lobbyists."³ Insurance representatives say that the practice is good because insurance industry people know how to tailor regulation efficiently to prevent financial burdens ultimately paid by consumers.

Pregnancy Helps Prevent Cancer

According to a study published in the journal Genetics,⁴ pregnancy relatively early in life activates a gene⁵ that helps females resist breast cancer. The researchers suggest that the effect may be permanent. This study was done on mice, but correlates with other studies showing that women who give birth at age 18 have less than half the risk of breast cancer as someone who waits until age 30.

Beer Won't Spoil Your Appetite

Two Canadian studies have confirmed what many people have long suspected: that the calories in a glass of beer do nothing to sate your appetite.⁶ Normally, the carbohydrates (and fats and proteins) you consume accumulate until your body decides it has its energy quota. You then lose your hunger until the next mealtime. However, it appears that the calories in beer are ignored for all practical purposes. The net result is that however many beers you drink with a meal (within reason I assume),

that many extra calories are consumed for the same amount of hunger satisfaction. This may help to explain beer bellies.

Premature Births

Researchers report that the risk of giving birth prematurely increases dramatically if the mother works long hours in a stressful atmosphere. Such stresses include noisy environments, standing for long periods of time, and working irregular hours. Mothers with a history of pre-term deliveries are especially vulnerable.⁷

Magnesium Overdose Mimics Stroke

A doctor at the University of Pennsylvania⁸ warns that the potential toxicity of magnesium, used widely in over-the-counter medications, is underestimated by both consumers and medical professionals. At particularly high risk are older people, anyone taking narcotics or anticholinergic drugs, and persons with gastrointestinal disease. There have been 310 adverse reactions, including 14 deaths, blamed on magnesium toxicity in reports to the FDA in the past 26 years. One study in a hospital setting found that doctors correctly diagnosed excessive magnesium ingestion in only 13 percent of the cases. One older woman with typical stroke symptoms of slurred speech and profound weakness lapsed into a coma. When finally diagnosed and treated for magnesium toxicity, she recovered to tell doctors she had been consuming up to two large bottles of antacid per day to combat indigestion and constipation.⁹

Breast-Fed Babies Sleep Peacefully

Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston¹⁰ found that four-month-olds who are breast-fed spend more time in the "nonrapid eye movement" phase of sleep. Formula babies are more likely to have a longer "rapid eye movement" (REM) phase. The significance of this difference is not quite clear yet, but the phenomenon is believed to have an impact on growth and development.¹¹

Cows Fueling Antibiotic Resistance

An analysis of bacteria in the mouths of dental patients reveals that the genetic code of a tetracycline-resistant bacterium is nearly identical to that found in bacteria that inhabits cattle. One of the researchers¹² says that because the match is so close, the gene almost certainly was transferred recently between species.¹³ About half of all antibiotics produced in the United States are used in farm animals.

Carrots Really Are Good for Eyes

A large university study has correlated intake of carotenoids with lowered risk of macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in older adults. Carotenoids form the yellow pigment of the macula and are believed to absorb solar radiation that might otherwise damage it.¹⁴

Listening for Heart Problems

A study of over 1,600 people in Massachusetts, spanning several decades, has found that hearing loss may be a greater predictor of heart attacks than high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, excessive weight, and cholesterol. It is currently thought that both the hearing losses and heart attacks stem from the same disease process, instead of one being a result of the other.¹⁵ Another phenomenon thought to relate to heart disease, sometimes called the "cardiac crease," appears as an indented line delimiting the earlobe from the rest of the auricle.

Lavender Oil at Bedtime

A letter published in the British Medical Journal¹⁶ reports that elderly nursing home residents fell asleep faster and slept longer after sniffing lavender oil. The aroma, in fact, seemed to work just as well as the sleeping pills some of the patients had previously been taking. The study involved only a few subjects, but improvements were noted in all of them.

Cholesterol Screenings Questionable

According to an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association,¹⁷ governmental cholesterol screening guidelines fail to predict fatal heart disease more than half the time. The study evaluated over 3,600 men and women for 12 years, selecting those deemed at high risk of death from cardiac disease. Forty-five percent of those who died from heart disease were predicted; the rest were not. This seems to add additional weight to arguments suggesting that blood cholesterol levels may not be nearly so important a consideration in heart disease as people think.

Airbag Injuries

Automobile airbags designed to prevent injuries by forming a protecting cushion are themselves causing a few injuries. The problems arise especially during low speed impacts. Airbags deploy at speed of about 100 mph, and if the driver's head is too close, injuries to the face and eyes may occur. If the driver's arms are in front of the bag, bones can be broken. For this reason, it is suggested that you drive with your hands at the 10 and 2 o'clock positions. At least one infant in a rear-facing car seat (in

the front passenger seat) has been killed as a result of an airbag deployment.¹⁸

Lung Cancer Deaths Increasing

Death rates from lung cancer among female smokers increased in the 1980s to six times the rate seen in the early 1960s, according to a new study.¹⁹ In men during the same time period, the rate almost doubled. However the death rate for men is still more than twice as high as for women. No increase was seen in nonsmokers of either sex. The study occurred over a period of time when cigarette manufacturers were introducing lower-tar cigarettes and filters.

Thin People Live Longer

According to a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine²⁰ one-quarter of all deaths among middle-aged women can be blamed on complications from being overweight. The work finds that the average 5 foot 5 inch tall woman lives longest if she weighs no more than 119 pounds. Add another 30 pounds or so and her life expectancy decreases 30 percent. The study of 115,000 women found that only 13 percent fell into the healthiest category. Current federal guidelines suggest an ideal weight for such women of 126 to 162 pounds.

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Brian Sutton, DC
Odessa, Florida
Email: BSuttonDC@aol.com
73160.676@compuserve.com

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