

DC Online (Research Reviews)

Brian Sutton, DC

Antioxidants Reducing Alzheimer's

A recent study of 4,740 elderly Americans suggests that a combination of vitamin E and C supplements may decrease the risk of Alzheimer's disease. Volunteers who had been habitually taking the vitamins showed a 78 percent lower chance of developing the disorder. This was a preliminary observational study, and the researchers note that a larger-scale controlled trial should follow before any firm conclusions are drawn.¹

1. *Archives of Neurology*, January 2004.
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Cod Liver Oil for Osteoarthritis?

A study from Cardiff University in Wales concludes that cod liver oil helps delay the development of some types of osteoarthritis. Before undergoing joint replacement surgery, a small group of patients was each given 1,000 mg of extra-high-strength cod liver oil. Among these patients, 86 percent showed reduced levels of enzymes associated with cartilage damage postsurgically; a placebo group showed a reduction in only 26 percent of the cases. The researchers believe that the fish oil lessens osteoarthritis from many other causes as well.²

1. Reuters, Feb. 12, 2004, reporting on the work of professor Bruce Caterson and associates.
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Baby Couch Potatoes

British researchers say a couch-potato lifestyle begins early in life, and trends are discernible in children as young as three years of age. Researchers calculated the total energy expenditure of 3- and 5-year-old children, and found the numbers to be much lower than recommended levels. They blame television, video games, and other lack of physical activity for the increasing prevalence of obesity in recent years.³ Almost 16 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 16 in Britain are classified as obese.

1. *Lancet*, Jan. 17, 2004.
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Medicare Pork

A new study published in the journal *Obesity Research*⁴ suggests that the average American

contributes about 175 of his or her tax dollars each year toward medical treatments for conditions afflicting obese Medicare and Medicaid patients.⁵ Excessive body mass contributes to or induces diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some types of cancer, gallbladder disease, and a number of other maladies. This research concludes that on average, the obesity-related component results in payments comprising about 5 percent of all medical costs. The percentages vary somewhat by state, with Alaska at the top of the list at 6.7 percent, and Arizona at the bottom at 4 percent. Nearly two-thirds of the population is either overweight or obese, according to government standards.

1. *Obesity Research* 2004;12:18-24.
 2. Associated Press, Jan. 21, 2004.
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Breast Cancer and HRT

A Swedish study of hormone replacement therapy⁶ has been stopped after researchers noticed an alarmingly high rate of cancer recurrence in women who had a history of the disease. The randomized clinical study, originally designed for five years, was called off after two years when 26 women were diagnosed with cancer recurrence, while a similar-sized control group produced only seven cancer diagnoses.⁷

1. *Lancet*, Feb. 7, 2004.
 2. Associated Press, Feb. 2, 2004.
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Fat Drugs

Some new drugs being developed to help the medical profession fight the obesity epidemic appear to increase the risk of colon cancer, according to a new study published in *Nature Medicine*.⁸ The subject of this study was an experimental compound (GW501516) being developed for treatment of "metabolic syndrome," the label given to overweight individuals who have high blood pressure and undesirable cholesterol levels. The drug interacts with a receptor called "peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor-delta," but the exact reason for the increased incidence of colon cancer is uncertain.

1. *Nature Medicine*, March 2004.
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Antidepressant Use in Children

Scientists from the National Institute of Mental Health are warning that parents and doctors should be more careful when giving children antidepressants. A number of studies have suggested an increase in suicidal tendencies when children use such drugs. Although the evidence is not yet conclusive, it is sufficient to raise concern about the skyrocketing use of drugs such as Paxil, Zoloft and Effexor in children.⁹

1. Associated Press, Feb. 2, 2004; interview with Dr. Matthew Rudorfer of the National Institute of Mental Health.

C-Reactive Cancer

A statistical analysis of 22,000 patient records by Johns Hopkins researchers suggests that elevated blood levels of C-reactive protein may be an early indicator of colon cancer. Patients with the highest levels were 2.5 times as likely to subsequently be diagnosed with the cancer than those with the lowest readings. About 150,000 people are diagnosed with colon cancer each year in the United States; approximately one third of those succumb to the disease.¹⁰

1. Reuters, Feb. 4, 2004.

Noisy Hospitals

A report from the Mayo clinic has surprised many medical professionals with something that has been obvious to patients for years: You can't get a good night's sleep in a hospital. One would think that the need for sleep in the healing process would be obvious to medical personnel, but anyone who is unfortunate enough to have been hospitalized overnight can tell you it's rarely a consideration. ("Wake up, Mrs. Jones, it's time for your sleeping pill.") Researchers placed noise-measuring devices in empty rooms, and also spent a few nights in a thoracic surgery recovery unit. Peak noise levels were as high as 113 decibels, slightly less than that produced by a chainsaw. One volunteer noted that such noises woke her at 1:15 a.m., 3:15 a.m., and 6:10 a.m. during a typical night. Patients who are actually being treated, of course, fare much worse.¹¹

1. *American Journal of Nursing*, February 2004.

More Fevers, Fewer Allergies

A study published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*¹² suggests that children who have more fevers during the first year of life tend to suffer from fewer allergies as they get older. By age 7, half of those who had no fever during their first year were showing allergic sensitivities. For those suffering two fevers during that time period, less than one third exhibited allergic reactions. The study examined the medical histories of 835 children in Detroit. Fever was defined as a temperature of at least 101 degrees. Fevers associated with upper respiratory infections were particularly associated with fewer allergic reactions later on.

1. *JACI*, February 2004.

Calories Climbing

A new federal study reports that Americans, especially women, are consuming a lot more calories per day than they did in years past. Combine this with the fact that fewer calories are being burned overall, and one might ask where the net difference is going: apparently, to the tummy and thighs, since about 39 million Americans are now classified as obese. Women between the ages of 20 and 74 have been munching out lately on 22 percent more calories than they did in 1971. Nearly all of the increase is coming from more carbohydrates. Men consume about 8 percent more than they did in

1971. The current average calorie consumption (as of the year 2000) is 1,877 for women and 2,618 for men.¹³

1. www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5304a3.htm.

Mercury and Brain Damage

A disturbing study from the Harvard School of Public Health¹⁴ reports measurable brain, neurological and heart damage in children after pre- and postnatal exposure to mercury from a predominately seafood diet. More than 1,000 mothers and children from the Faroe Islands in Denmark participated in this 14-year study. Most of the women tested at government limits for mercury by way of hair analysis; the children were tested via cord blood at birth, and by hair analysis at ages 7 and 14. The researchers performed a number of tests that revealed poor adaptation of the heart to varying demands for blood output and delays in nerve transmission in the brain that were more severe as the measured levels of mercury increased. The researchers were also concerned that they were able to discern problems in children whose levels were not much higher than EPA and other independent authority limits.

1. *Journal of Pediatrics*, February 2004.

Brian Sutton, DC
Colorado Springs, Colorado
bsuttondc@earthlink.net

MAY 2004