

DC Online

Brian Sutton, DC

Iron-Deficient Brains

Researchers from Pennsylvania State University report that mild iron deficiency appeared to result in mental performance problems in a group of women they studied. They found a direct correlation between lack of iron and the time it took to complete cognitive tests. Attention span and memory functions also were affected. However, the disparity disappeared after subjects were given iron supplements for four months.¹ The placebo-controlled study involved 113 women in various states of deficiency at baseline.

1. Drs. Laura Murray-Kolk and John Beard, reporting at a meeting of the American Society of Nutritional Sciences, April 19, 2004.

Bad Vibrations

Workers who spend a lot of time using vibrating tools are susceptible to certain permanent peripheral neurological problems, and a new study may explain what is happening. Researchers from the Medical College of Wisconsin, studying hand-arm vibration syndrome, report that continuous vibration appears to constrict arteries, which leads to nerve malnutrition. Symptoms begin with pain, tingling, numbness, and cold sensitivity. In advanced cases, dexterity is severely impacted. The researchers think that the actual damage occurs because of long-term arterial constriction, so they hypothesize that other factors, such as smoking or chronic exposure to cold, may have similar effects.²

1. Drs. Syndya Govindaraju and Danny Riley, report to the American Association of Anatomists, April 19, 2004.

Antibiotics and Breast Cancer

A study from the University of Washington in Seattle suggests a link between breast cancer and antibiotic use. Researchers looked at the histories of 10,219 women belonging to a group health plan, and found that those who had 25 or more prescriptions for antibiotics, or those who had taken them for more than 500 days, had twice the risk of breast cancer than those who had taken no antibiotics. The study spanned 17 years. The breast cancer link appeared to be somewhat proportional to how often antibiotics were used, as those who had taken them less often still showed an increased, but slightly lessened, chance of the cancer.³ This study supports results seen in an earlier Finnish study of a similar number of women.

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, February 18, 2004.

Pig Worms for Crohn's

If you're looking for a different kind of treatment for inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), a German company may have just the thing: a solution of pig whipworm eggs. The idea came from a University of Iowa professor who had noticed an increase in IBD coinciding with a drop in human intestinal parasitic infections. Pig worms were chosen because they do not survive long in humans. Preliminary experimentation suggested a twice-monthly dosage of a few thousand eggs led to a remission in half the cases of ulcerative colitis and up to 70 percent of Crohn's disease cases.⁴ The company's sister entity provides leeches and maggots to clean up wounds.

1. *New Scientist*, April 6, 2004.

Carbs Needed After a Workout

The American Council on Exercise is warning athletes to be wary of restricting carbohydrates too much, especially after a physical workout.⁵ Since the energy for muscle cells is stored as glycogen (a carbohydrate), it seems logical that having a carbohydrate meal post-workout is the quickest way to replenish those reserves. Insufficient replenishment, the council says, can result in possible muscle breakdown, or at least undue fatigue during your next workout. Experts suggest that the most beneficial time to eat after a workout is 30-60 minutes later.⁶

1. www.acefitness.org.
2. Associated Press, April 18, 2004.

Your Brain on Alcohol

Researchers from Vanderbilt University in Tennessee and the University of California San Francisco report that heavy social drinkers show the same type of brain damage as hospitalized alcoholics.⁷ The damage is visible on brain scans, and mental function tests show enough problems to assume that day-to-day function is impaired. The impairment was most noticeable on working memory, processing speed, attention, executive function, and balance.⁸ Heavy drinking was defined as 100 drinks per month for men and 80 drinks per month for women.

1. *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, April 2004.
2. Reuters, April 14, 2004.

ADHD/TV

A study published in *Pediatrics*⁹ reports a strong correlation between attention deficit disorder and television viewing early in life. The study concludes that the risk of being diagnosed with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder at age 7 increases nearly 10 percent for each hour children watch television per day between the ages of 1 and 3. The average time spent in front of the television in the study group was 2.2 hours for 1-year-olds, and 3.6 hours for 3-year-olds. However, some children

spent as much as 12 hours per day watching television. The study used data from 2,500 children.¹⁰

1. *Pediatrics*, April 2004.
 2. Reuters, April 5, 2004.
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Drug Peddler Gifting

In an unusual action, federal prosecutors recently put salespeople from a pharmaceutical company on trial for essentially doing their jobs. The prosecutors charge that the kickbacks and other gifts paid to doctors are reaching criminal levels, and are unduly influencing prescription patterns of doctors and driving up health care costs. The gifts in question include trips to exclusive golf and ski resorts, as well as "educational grants" that paid for cocktail and office Christmas parties.¹¹ A number of medical professionals are starting to acknowledge the ethical problems created by these gifts; one sponsors an interesting Web site at www.nofreelunch.org.

1. Associated Press, April 12, 2004.
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Depressing News About Antidepressants

Here's a good trivia question: What is the fastest-growing group of prescription antidepressant users in the United States? Answer: preschoolers. An organization that keeps track of prescription drug use says that between 1998 and 2002, orders nearly doubled, and the trend appears to be continuing. The study looked at a sample of 2 million insured children, and found that while prescription use increased an average of 10 percent per year for all children up to age 18, those under age 5 are getting more drugs quicker.¹² Girls are especially likely to get the prescriptions, presumably because they get depressed more often. Other possible factors cited for the increase include a greater awareness by pediatricians about depression, although a case might be made that there is instead a greater ignorance of how to deal with children. The FDA has warned against using certain antidepressants in children because of a potential suicide risk.

1. *Psychiatric Services*, April 2004.
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Speed Humps Slow Injury Rate

The *American Journal of Public Health*¹³ reports that a statistical analysis of neighborhoods that have installed speed humps demonstrates a significant reduction in deaths and injuries where the structures have been installed.¹⁴ In Oakland, California, a 15 percent reduction in such incidents was seen after 1,600 speed humps were installed on residential streets. Speed humps differ from speed bumps in that humps are more gradual and will usually allow a vehicle to pass fairly comfortably at about 20 mph. Motor vehicle-related injuries are the leading cause of death for children 15 years of age and younger.¹⁵

1. *AJPH*, April 2004.
2. www.ajph.org.

3. Associated Press, March 30, 2004.

Vitamin E for the Bladder

A study relating dietary intake of vitamin E to bladder cancer suggests a benefit from the antioxidant. Researchers questioned 1,000 Houston residents about the foods they consumed, and noticed that those eating foods richest in the vitamin had bladder cancer half as often as those with the poorest vitamin E intake. The range of vitamin E consumption among the participants was relatively small, so researchers are not certain how much of an additional improvement, if any, is possible. More studies have been called for, as this one involved a relatively small group. An earlier study from Finland found a reduction of prostate cancer by about one-third in men with an elevated intake of vitamin E.¹⁶

1. Associated Press, March 29, 2004.

A Bit of a Stretch

A report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹⁷ suggests that pre-workout stretching probably isn't as useful for injury prevention as is generally thought. This analysis of five studies found that stretching before a workout is basically useless for most athletes, although the authors hypothesize that gymnasts and dancers (who require greater flexibility) might benefit.¹⁸ Research does suggest, however, that exercise that results in a warm-up of muscles (thereby increasing blood flow and responsiveness) does help prevent injuries.

1. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, March 2004. www.ms-se.com.
2. Associated Press, March 28, 2004.

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