

DC On-Line (Research)

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Alcoholic Recovery

According to a study from a research group in California, recovering alcoholics who stay on the wagon can recover nearly all of their pre-alcoholic mental capabilities, given enough time.¹ The study compared alcoholics who had been abstinent for an average of seven years with nondrinkers. Tests of cognitive abilities between the two groups showed little difference. All of the recovering alcoholics in this study had stopped drinking before the age of 50. Another study now underway is looking at older recovering alcoholics who reformed later in life.

1. *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, September 2006.
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Exercise Benefits Can Last Years

A study from the National Institute on Aging in Bethesda, Md.,² reports that adults who wish to stay independent when they get older can do a lot toward that end by staying physically active right now. Researchers found that the most important predictor of an elderly person's ability to get around on their own was a history of physical activity in the previous decades of their life. Such individuals were much more likely to live longer, be able to walk with greater ease, and have an overall higher quality of life as they aged.

1. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, July 2006.
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Smoking and the Terrible Twos

A report in the journal *Child Development*^{3,4} finds a very strong link between behavioral problems in children during their second year of life and *in utero* exposure to cigarette toxins. The study looked at 93 toddlers and found, among the 44 whose mothers had regularly smoked during pregnancy, marked increases in defiance and aggression, as well as a lessened ability to learn and react to social cues. They also were less interested in playful interactions with their mothers.

1. *Child Development*, July/August 2006;77:893.
 2. [Click to view it online.](#)
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Alcohol in the Fetus

An analysis of data from Australia has found that individuals exposed to moderate levels of alcohol in the womb are more likely to become alcoholics later in life. The effect was especially pronounced when the exposure was during the first trimester: Mothers who consumed three drinks or more at a time tripled the chance of their offspring becoming an alcoholic as a teenager or young adult. These results

were in addition to any genetic or environmental factors known to the researchers.⁵

1. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, September 2006.
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Shift Work and Prostate Cancer

Men who work rotating shifts are at a higher risk for prostate cancer, according to a Japanese report published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*.⁶ The researchers were following up on existing data that suggests higher levels of breast and colorectal cancers occur in shift workers. The researchers' investigation found that prostate cancers tripled in the rotating shift group compared to day workers. Men working a steady night shift showed just a small increase compared to the day group. Current thinking contends that disturbances in melatonin levels somehow set up conditions favorable for the cancer development.

1. *AJE*, September 2006.
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Hearing Impairment From Hormone Replacement Therapy

A group from the University of Rochester Medical Center in New York has found a link between hearing problems and hormone replacement therapy.⁷ Their study of 124 women revealed that those taking progestin as part of their postmenopausal treatment had a harder time understanding normal speech. The research was created to validate and qualify findings from earlier work that found hearing abnormalities in women on general hormone therapies. This study suggests progestin may be the culprit. Researchers noted inner ear and brain function abnormalities in the progestin group as well. Animal studies also have suggested a link between hormonal cycles and hearing.

1. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Sept. 5, 2006.
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Rampant, Resistant Staph

According to a group of researchers from the University of California, Los Angeles, the antibiotic-resistant superbug that has been making headlines in recent years is becoming much more prevalent. The researchers found that more than half of all skin and soft-tissue infections seen in various emergency rooms across the United States were due to the deadly methicillin-resistant *staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). The infection was once confined mostly to hospital patients, but now is appearing more often among the general population. Most patients seeking treatment thought the infection was a large, nonhealing pimple or spider bite. The good news is that these non-hospital-acquired infections are generally (for the time being) easier to resolve, with drainage and cleansing of the area being the primary method of treatment.

1. *NEJM*, Aug. 17, 2006.
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Juice for Alzheimer's Prevention

A comparison of fruit and vegetable juice consumption of more than 1,800 people in Washington State suggests a protective effect against Alzheimer's disease. The researchers chose juices to study, reasoning they are more likely to contain active antioxidant compounds than cooked foods. They found

that individuals who averaged three or more servings each week had a 25 percent lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease compared to those who had less than one serving per week.⁹ More studies are planned to try to determine the relative benefits of antioxidant vitamins and polyphenol compounds.

1. *The American Journal of Medicine*, September 2006.
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Oil the Heart

Portable heart defibrillators can help save lives, but according to a new report from the Heart Center at Regions Hospital in St. Paul, Minn., many more lives could be saved if people just ate more fish or at least took fish oil supplements.¹⁰ The team did a computer simulation based on results of past research data, finding a 6.4 percent total death reduction with an increased consumption of omega-3 fatty acids. In contrast, defibrillators saved about 1 percent of the virtual population.

Another study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*¹¹ reports that fish oil appears to have a beneficial effect on the cardiac electrical system, at least if it comes from baked or broiled (but not fried) fish. In this case, irregular heartbeats and sudden-death incidents due to cardiac failure were reduced.

1. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, October 2006.
 2. *JACC*, Aug. 1, 2006.
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Vitamin D for the Pancreas

Research from Northwestern University in Chicago reports vitamin D supplements can nearly halve the incidence of pancreatic cancer, a particularly deadly form of cancer and the fourth-leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States.¹² The pancreatic research was prompted by other data linking areas of the country with greater sunlight exposure to a lower incidence of prostate, breast and colon cancers. The researchers analyzed data from more than 115,000 individuals, finding a 43 percent decrease in the cancer incidence of those who habitually took 400 IU of vitamin D per day compared to those who took none. A greater intake of vitamin D did not offer additional protection.¹³

1. *Reuters*, Sept. 13, 2006.
 2. *Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers & Prevention*, September 2006.
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C-Section Deaths

A report from the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control warns it is noticing a higher incidence of infant mortality arising from "elective" Cesarean section procedures. C-section deliveries have risen to 20.6 percent in the United States, and while few dispute its benefit in a true emergency, this study found that when used as a convenience procedure, the risk of death nearly tripled compared to vaginal delivery. The researchers could not pinpoint a single definitive reason for the additional deaths. The study examined data from 5.8 million births.¹⁴

1. *Birth*, September 2006.

Weight Loss Oil

The University of South Australia is reporting another benefit of consuming fish oil: weight loss. Researchers monitored four groups of overweight individuals for three months. The first two groups kept their normal diet, but took supplements containing fish oil or safflower oil, respectively. The other two groups followed the same supplement regimen as the first two groups (fish oil or safflower oil), except both groups also participated in a mild exercise program. The only one of the four groups to report weight loss, an average of 4.5 pounds per person over the three months of the study, was the group on the fish oil/exercise program. The researchers were surprised these people had lost so much weight, especially given the fact that they were free to eat anything they wanted. The exercise program was a 45-minute walk or run, three times per week.¹⁵

1. *Reuters*, July 28, 2006, reporting on the work of Alison Hill of the University of South Australia.

DECEMBER 2006