

DC Online (Wellness Research)

Brian Sutton, DC

DC Online is a periodic column featuring summaries of the latest wellness research relevant to chiropractic practice. Each summary includes references to assist readers interested in learning more about the topic discussed.

Obesity Deaths

Health statisticians are now warning that obesity might soon become the number-one cause of deaths from cancer. Currently, smoking holds that honor, as it is responsible for about 30 percent of all cancer-related deaths. Obesity ranks second, at 14 percent and 20 percent for men and women, respectively. However, because of the success of anti-smoking campaigns and legislation, smoking is gradually becoming less of a factor. Thus, obesity by default is expected to become the new leader in the near future. In addition, more research is turning up evidence for the role of excess weight in many different types of cancer formations. Earlier studies focused on food content, but it's starting to look as if body fat itself is more relevant.¹

1. Associated Press, Feb. 15, 2008, reporting on a presentation by Dr. Walter C. Willett of the Harvard School of Public Health at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.
-

Promising Diabetic Study Halted

A 10,000-patient study of a treatment program for diabetics, which had showed promise in preliminary studies, was abruptly halted 18 months early by the National Institutes of Health. The treatment consisted of using medications to push blood sugar levels to near-normal readings in an effort to minimize diabetic complications. Unfortunately, there was one complication that couldn't be minimized: death. About 28 percent more of the diabetics who were getting the aggressive new treatment died during the study, compared to those getting more traditional treatment. The researchers are at a loss to explain the reasons for the higher death rate, other than that they consisted mostly of fatal heart attacks and other "unexpected sudden deaths."²

1. Dr. William Friedewald of Columbia University as quoted by the Associated Press, Feb. 6, 2008.
-

HPV and Oral Cancer

The human papillomavirus (HPV) has now caught up with smoking and alcohol as a leading cause of upper throat cancers, according to a study from Johns Hopkins University.³ It has been suggested that

decreases in smoking and increases in oral sex are responsible for the surge, but no real research has been done to confirm that. Indeed, some data suggests the HPV virus might be transferred to the mouth simply as a result of not washing your hands. While it is increasing for men, throat cancers attributable to HPV have been diminishing in women. Merck & Co., Inc., the makers of the current HPV vaccine, plan to push for government approval for a vaccine for boys sometime next year.⁴

1. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, Feb. 1, 2008.
 2. Associated Press, Feb. 1, 2008.
-

Cold Medicines Sending Children to Emergency Rooms

A new study released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, just a few weeks after the FDA issued warnings about the dangers of cough and cold medications for very young children, reports that about 7,000 children each year wind up in hospital emergency rooms as a result of taking such medications. While many of the children took the medications without direct adult supervision, about one-quarter of the cases were determined to have been properly dosed. The children cited in this study were 11 years and younger.⁵

1. Study to be published in the April 2008 issue of *Pediatrics*.
-

The Secret of Longevity

Researchers from the University of Cambridge⁶ who statistically analyzed lifestyles of about 20,000 relatively healthy subjects report they have found four basic lifestyle habits that can add about 14 years to your life when all are observed: Don't smoke; get regular physical activity; eat five servings of fruits and vegetables daily; and drink alcohol in moderation. Social class and excess weight did not seem to affect the outcome. The ages of those involved in this study ranged from 45 to 79.

1. Kay-Tee Khaw and colleagues; their work has been published online at:
<http://medicine.plosjournals.org/perlserv/?request=get-document&doi=10.1371/journal.pmed.0050012&ct=1>.
-

Breast-Feeding and Allergies

A report published in the January issue of *Pediatrics*⁷ retracts an earlier position that cautioned nursing mothers against consuming potential allergens such as cow's milk, peanuts, eggs, nuts and other foods when there is a family history of allergies to the foods. The new recommendations not only remove the maternal dietary restrictions for families with a history of such allergies, but also advise exclusive breast-feeding (especially in a familial history circumstance) for a minimum of four months. How times have changed!

1. *Pediatrics*, January 2008.
-

Orphaned Brains

An unusual study from Romania might make parents think again about sending their children off to day care. Researchers comparing the IQ of children raised in orphanages to those who were rescued at some point by foster parents found a dramatic difference between the two groups. In some cases, it meant the difference between borderline retardation and average intelligence.⁸ The researchers conclude that one-on-one care at a young age has a definite impact on cognitive and intellectual development. The earlier children are taken out of the institutional environment, the less stunting occurs, according to this work. Children rescued before age 2 showed a 15-point IQ increase. For some of the age groups, each month spent in the orphanage translated to a half-point lower IQ score. The Romanian government began its own foster care program shortly after this study concluded. In fact, government policy now prohibits institutionalization of children under the age of 2 except in extenuating circumstances.

Children raised in their biological homes still did much better than both groups - at about 10-20 points higher than the foster care group.

1. Associated Press, Dec. 20, 2007
-

False Whooping Cough Reports

A recent outbreak of whooping cough in the northeastern United States has now been traced to its source: misdiagnoses by a medical lab. Hundreds of health care workers, tested after being exposed to a couple of patients who were genuinely infected, were given antibiotics and furloughed to prevent further spread of the disease. In at least one case, the hospital had to close off beds because of insufficient staff. However, it turns out none of the workers was actually infected. Apparently, the problem stems from the choice of lab tests. Because the most reliable test takes at least a week to culture the bacteria, some labs have started using a faster but less consistent test, which was the case in these false positives.⁹

1. Associated Press, Aug. 23, 2007.
-

Teflon Babies

A report last July from the online journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*¹⁰ correlates the use of nonstick cookware in the kitchen with low-birth-weight babies. Previous research in rodents found developmental problems resulting from exposure to perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoate (PFOA); this study examines the effect on humans. Researchers used umbilical cord blood from 293 women to test for the chemicals, and then correlated the findings with birth weight and head circumference. Both were decreased relative to higher concentrations of the compounds. The study was done at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore.

1. *EHP*, July 2007.
-

Plants for Menopause

Research from the University of Alabama at Birmingham suggests foods with high polyphenol content

may lessen some of the symptoms of menopause. Researchers report they were able to reduce excessive blood pressure (induced by a high salt intake) by about 50 percent using kudzu root extract. Kudzu is a woody vine with long, purplish flowers. The root has some estrogen-like activity and is used in traditional medicine to treat problems ranging from alcohol cravings to cluster headaches. This report suggests kudzu, as well as grapes, soy and other polyphenol-containing foods, reduce blood sugar, insulin and leptin concentrations.¹¹

1. Reuters, Aug. 15, 2007, reporting on the work of Dr. J. Michael Wyss.
-

BMI Is Out; Tape Measure Is In

A report in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*¹² suggests if you're looking for an outward physical indication of atherosclerosis, you should forget the BMI index and use the waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) instead. Whereas the BMI only shows a correlation at the upper extreme of the scale, the WHR exhibits a very linear correlation across the board. In contrast to other studies that suggest a target waist size, this research simply says the smaller waist you have, the less clogged your arteries are. "Even a small pot belly puts us at higher risk when compared to a flat tummy," according to the study leader.¹³ The 2,744 subjects involved in this study (median age of 45) were relatively healthy and had not yet experienced a heart attack or stroke.

1. *J Am Coll Cardiol*, 2007;50:752-9 (published online Aug. 6, 2007).
 2. Reuters, Tuesday, Aug. 14, 2007.
-

The Placebo Effect Explained

Researchers from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor are delving a bit deeper into the physiology of placebos. The upshot of their work, published in the journal *Neuron*,¹⁴ is that as soon as patients begin expecting a good result, dopamine is released from the nucleus accumbens. Dopamine then appears to stimulate the production of endorphins - the "feel-good" compounds of the body. The study used PET scans to quantify dopamine activity, which was higher in those subjects who were judged to be expecting greater relief from their treatment. Interestingly, the most optimistic of these patients (who also generally benefited the most from placebos) tended to be the most optimistic in the second part of the study, during which they played a gambling game for cash rewards. Brain scans again showed higher activity in the nucleus accumbens in those subjects.¹⁵

1. *Neuron*, July 19, 2007.
2. Reuters, Aug. 1, 2007.

APRIL 2008