



Women's Health

NEWSLETTER

Volume 15, Number 3

Spring 2007

Women Will Benefit from a Stronger FDA

Most of us take for granted the safety of the food we eat and the medications we take. Experts say recent recalls of fresh produce and headlines over side-effects that emerge long after a drug has been approved point to the need for better oversight of the FDA, the agency assigned to regulate those products.

The FDA regulates products that account for 25 cents of every dollar we spend as consumers—but its budget is less than half that of the Chicago public school system says the Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR). The SWHR has joined with more than 20 organizations to form the Coalition for a Stronger FDA, seeking more funding and support from Congress.

The SWHR helped to get funding for the Office of Women's Health at the FDA so it could build a database to track sex differences in drugs. But the agency still uses a paper-based system to gather that data, as well as post-market reports on adverse treatment effects. "This hampers the agency's ability to conduct research, including analysis for sex and gender differences, which is critical to understanding if a treatment affects women and men differently," says Phyllis Greenberger, CEO of the SWHR.

"We have to improve these processes so that researchers, doctors, and patients can get the information they need faster," says Greenberger. "Getting the answer wrong or not getting the answer at all can mean life and death when it comes to medical treatments." For more on how disease and medication affect women log onto: www.womenshealthresearch.org

Source: *Weill Medical College of Cornell University Women's Health Advisor*, January 2007

"Women are up to 70 percent more likely than men to suffer bad reactions to the drugs they take—and their side effects tend to be more serious."

—Marianne Legato, MD, founder and director of the Foundation for Gender-Specific Medicine in New York City, as seen in *Prevention*, March 2007

Making Childbirth Safer

Many hospitals are taking practical steps to make childbirth safer for women. These initiatives include emphasizing better communication between obstetric nurses and physicians; discouraging or prohibiting labor inductions prior to 39 weeks (unless medically necessary); and curtailing the use of Pitocin, a synthetic form of the hormone oxytocin often used to induce or speed up labor. Since many childbirth interventions contribute to risky and/or complicated labors, it is encouraging to see hospitals make an effort to follow the available evidence and reduce the use of these interventions. Let's hope this trend catches on!

Source: *National Women's Health Network*, September/October 2006

Popular Heartburn Drugs Linked to Hip Fractures

Nexium, Prevacid, and Prilosec—members of a class of drugs known as proton pump inhibitors and used for heartburn (acid reflux) relief by millions today—have been found to be associated with an increased risk of hip fracture in the elderly. Using a universal database, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine examined the medical records of more than 145,000 British patients over age 50. Patients who used the drugs for more than a year had a 44 percent higher risk of hip fracture than non-users. Long-term users who received high doses of the drugs had as much as 2.6 times the normal risk. Researchers speculate that while the drugs lower a stomach's acidity levels, they also make it more difficult for the body to absorb calcium, which can lead to weaker bones. Men using the drugs had about twice the risk of hip fractures as the women; investigators conjectured that women were more likely to be consuming calcium supplements as part of a post-menopausal therapy. The study also found a similar but smaller risk (21 percent increase) of hip fractures for another class of acid-fighting drugs called H2 blockers (Tagamet, Pepcid, Zantac, Acid).

Source: *Cleveland Clinic Arthritis Advisor*, March 2007

Sleep Well for Better Health

Nearly a third of all Americans have sleep disorders, especially those with chronic ailments. If you lose sleep even for a single night, your chances of experiencing inflammatory disorders go up—and inflammation is linked with heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, and other autoimmune disorders. Medical researchers at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA recently reported in *Archives of Internal Medicine* that sleep loss could upset your immune system by triggering cellular and genetic processes. Elevated levels of interleukin 6 and tumor necrosis factor alpha, generated by white blood cells called monocytes during a sleepless night, can increase inflammation. "Testing of interventions that target sleep and/or its biological consequences might identify new strategies to constrain inflammation and to promote health as people age," authors conclude.

Source: *UCLA Division of Geriatrics Healthy /Years*, December 2006

The Ovary-Boosting Pain Reliever

Can you name a common medicine that may be good for your ovaries? Try acetaminophen, the active ingredient in Tylenol. Greek researchers found that women who took acetaminophen as few as five times a month (and as often as once a day) were 30 percent less likely to develop ovarian cancer than those who used the painkiller rarely or never. The scientific explanation: Stefanos Bonovas, MD, a pharmacology researcher at the University of Athens, says the drug seems to shrink the ovaries, making it more difficult for cancer to develop. But, no, you should not take acetaminophen just to prevent cancer—long-term use can lead to chronic kidney and liver failure. Still, if you need something for pain or fever, the finding is another reason to choose acetaminophen first.

Source: *Health*, March 2007

Better Cervical Cancer Screening

In a study including 1,305 women ages 40 to 50, researchers analyzed the results of Pap smears and testing for human papillomavirus (HPV), a common cause of cervical cancer. Result: Twenty-one percent of the women who tested positive for HPV at the beginning of the study developed cervical cancer or precancerous cervical lesions within a 10-year period, even though results of their Pap smears, which also had been performed at the beginning of the study, were negative. If you are over age 40: Ask your gynecologist about receiving an HPV test with your PAP smear.

Source: *Susanne Kruger Kjaer, MD, DMSc, professor, Danish Cancer Society, Copenhagen as seen in Bottom Line Health*, March 2007

Sight Saver

Two new drugs (one a proven cancer fighter) have given millions of macular degeneration patients hope of improving their vision. “With these new treatments, we’re able to keep people functioning and help them live productive lives,” says Richard Rosen, MD, a retina specialist at the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary.

Avastin is already approved for cancer treatment and is being used to treat macular degeneration, and Lucentis was approved as a treatment for the disease last year. Both are anti-angiogenesis drugs, which stop the growth of blood vessels that feed tumors. When injected directly into the eye to treat the “wet” form of macular degeneration, the drugs stop the growth of vessels in the retina that obstruct vision—Cynthia Dermody

Source: *Reader's Digest*, March 2007

Diabetes Treatment

Many people with diabetes find it difficult to maintain target blood glucose levels over time. The recent A Diabetes Outcome Progression Trial (ADOPT) found that after four years, patients who started diabetes treatment with Avandia (rosiglitazone) were at lower risk for hypoglycemia and rising glucose levels than those on Glucophage (metformin) or Micronase (glyburide). However, rosiglitazone was associated with more weight gain and edema and higher cardiovascular risk than glyburide. Given these findings, review your own unique set of health care risks with your physician to find the safest, most effective treatment plan.

Source: *The New England Journal of Medicine*, December 7, 2006, p. 2427, as seen in *The Johns Hopkins Medical Letter, Health After 50*, April 2007

Losing Weight Affects Bones

If you are trying to lose weight, it’s especially important to exercise to protect your bones. Cutting calories alone can lead to bone loss, according to a recent study from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, which involved mostly overweight people who either dieted or exercised to lose weight. After a year both groups lost comparable amounts of weight (18 and 15 pounds, respectively), but the dieters also had a 2 percent decline in bone density. In contrast, the exercisers showed no change in bone mass. Body weight helps build bone, and weight loss reduces this load. Exercise, however, can counter diet-induced bone loss by increasing mechanical stress on the skeleton, which stimulates production of new bone.

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter*, March 2007



Why We Love Chocolate, Reason #27

As if we needed another excuse: New evidence suggests that eating a little chocolate might help ward off artery-blocking, heart-attack-provoking blood clots. During a recent study, Johns Hopkins University researchers discovered that clots formed more slowly in the blood of chocolate lovers than in those who passed on the sweets. Cocoa beans contain chemicals called flavonoids, which seem to have blood-thinning effects similar to those of aspirin, known to reduce platelet clumping. Dark chocolate, which is lower in sugar and fat than milk chocolate, is the healthier way to reap the newfound rewards.

—Lindsay Miler

Source: *Reader's Digest*, March 2007

BPW/NJ

Women's Health Newsletter

PRESIDENT, BPW/NJ *Jeanne Jameson*
EDITOR *Gloria Pierce*
DESIGN *Lauren Simeone Berman*

WOMEN'S HEALTH MANAGEMENT TEAM

Denise Dagostaro *Susan Mennella*
Kim Friedman-Muller *Vicki Mack*
Gloria Pierce *Gerri Poranski*
Kathy Klinowski *Doris Villa*
Pat Wittek *Linda Worman*

PURPOSE: To provide, with the support of BPW/NJ, pertinent, up-to-date information—including legislation—on health issues affecting women.

The information contained in this newsletter is intended to educate women about subjects pertinent to their health; it is not intended to act as a substitute for consultation with a physician.

New Campaign to Increase Awareness, Early Diagnosis, and Treatment for COPD

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) and a coalition of professional societies, health, and advocacy groups have launched a new campaign, “Learn More, Breathe Better,” to increase public awareness of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Due to smoking, more women now die of COPD than men. More than 12 million people have been diagnosed with COPD, and an estimated 12 million more may not even know they have it. In COPD (also called emphysema or chronic bronchitis) airways in the lungs become blocked, making it difficult to breathe. Symptoms include shortness of breath, chronic cough, excess sputum production, and wheezing. A diagnosis is confirmed with spirometry, a breath test that measures the amount and speed of the air a person exhales. Treatments include inhaled bronchodilators, corticosteroids, and oxygen for people with severe COPD. To learn more, log onto <http://www.learnaboutcopd.org>.

*Source: Weill Medical College of Cornell University
Women's Health Advisor, March 2007*

Remove Your Shoes, Relieve Your Knees

Give your feet and your knees some relief. Rush Medical College researchers asked 75 men and women with osteoarthritis of the knee to walk in their favorite comfortable footwear and then stroll barefoot. The researchers found that going shoeless reduced stress and impact on knees by nearly 12 percent.

One reason may be that the heel lift of your shoe increases the load on your joints. Lowering the pressure on your knees might slow the progression of arthritis. Still, going around barefoot isn't always an option, and it may worsen a common condition called plantar fasciitis that causes heel pain. Instead, if you have arthritic knees, you may want to choose shoes that support the natural contour of your arch and have a low heel, and talk to your doctor about supportive inserts or custom orthotics. —SY

Source: Prevention, February 2007

Sleeping Pill Caution

Be careful when taking over-the-counter sleeping pills, warns the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. These are actually antihistamines, which make most people drowsy. Though relatively risk-free, they can have a residual effect, reducing alertness and impairing driving performance the next day, even if you don't feel drowsy. This is especially true in older people. Antihistamines can also worsen urinary retention in men who have an enlarged prostate. Since tolerance can develop, don't take the pills for more than three or four nights in a row. Nighttime pain relievers (such as Tylenol PM) also contain antihistamines to promote drowsiness, but if you don't have pain, simply take a sleep aid. A generic antihistamine is the cheapest option.

Source: University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, March 2007

Ovary Removal Reduces Risk for Carriers of BRCA Genetic Mutations

Women who carry the BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations have a 60-80 percent lifetime risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Doctors have advised preventive bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy (removal of both ovaries and fallopian tubes) by a woman's mid-30s to prevent ovarian cancer. Until now, it's been unclear how much the surgery actually reduces risk. But according to the first large study of the procedure, published July 12 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the surgery is dramatically beneficial.

Researchers followed more than 1,800 women listed in genetic registries in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Israel and found those who underwent the prophylactic surgery had an approximately 80 percent reduced risk of ovarian and fallopian tube cancer and lowered their risk of peritoneal cancer to just four percent.

Without the surgery, the researchers estimate the risk of ovarian cancer at 62 percent for BRCA1 carriers and 18 percent for BRCA2 carriers up to age 75. “BRCA2 carriers could be candidates for surgery closer to menopause at about age 45 without increasing ovarian cancer risk, though breast cancer protection would not be as optimal,” says lead researcher Steven A. Narod, MD.

*Source: Weill Medical College of Cornell University
Women's Health Advisor, October 2006*

Proximity Testing, Treatment Crucial to Stroke Survival

Knowing whether you may be a risk of stroke, recognizing the symptoms and getting prompt medical help often can determine whether you live or die or suffer severe consequences from the event. But just as important may be the area where you live and your proximity to testing and quick treatment with drugs, according to a recent report.

The person experiencing the stroke may not realize it; since stroke symptoms sometimes clear quickly, it's easy to think nothing is seriously wrong, even though fast action might still be needed. In addition to swift recognition of symptoms, time is of the essence—the distance to medical help is a key element governing stroke survival. Ideally, patients should get the hospital within one hour to allow time for diagnosis and treatment with tissue plasminogen activator (t-PA) in case of a clot-caused stroke.

To recognize the signs of a stroke, use the acronym FAST: Face—weakness or numbness, droopy mouth or crooked smile; Arm or leg—weakness or numbness; Speech—difficulty in understanding or speaking; Time—call 9-1-1 immediately (October 9, 2006 *Archives of Internal Medicine*).

Source: Cleveland Clinic Heart Advisor, March 2007

HOT flashes

♀ Osteoporosis drug reduces breast cancer risk significantly, reports Marc E Lippman, MD. New finding: Raloxifene (Evista), a prescription drug used to treat osteoporosis in post-menopausal women, decreases the risk of invasive breast cancer by 58 percent in women who don't have a family history of the disease...and by 89 percent in women with a family history. Raloxifene is believed to reduce estrogen's tumor-promoting effects.

(Marc E, Lippman, MD, is John G. Searle professor and chair of the department of internal medicine, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and leader of a study of raloxifene and breast cancer, published in *Clinical Cancer Research*.)

Source: *Bottom Line Personal*, January 15, 2007

♀ Breast-feeding reduces future effects of stress. Scott Montgomery, PhD, found that breast-feeding a baby for the first weeks of life actually makes kids less stressed in later years. The physical contact between mother and baby may influence the infant's hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, the neural pathways involved in stress response.

Source: *Scott Montgomery, Ph.D. associate professor, department of medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden as seen in First for Women, March 5, 2007*

♀ If you take black cohosh for menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, beware of possible liver damage. The British government recently required products containing the herb to carry a warning label about this danger. Stop taking black cohosh immediately and seek medical advice if you have any of these symptoms: jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes), dark urine, nausea, vomiting, unusual tiredness, abdominal pain, and loss of appetite. Though some small studies suggest that the herb may help reduce hot flashes, there is no strong evidence that it is effective. Previously some researchers had warned women not to take the herb for longer than three to six months.

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, November 2006*

♀ A recent retrospective study that examined all low-risk pregnancies in the U.S. between 1998-2001 found that infant mortality rates for babies delivered through Cesarean section was 2.9 times higher than for babies delivered vaginally. The study, performed by reviewing birth certificates and infant death records, excluded mothers who had high-risk pregnancies and/or medical indications for a Cesarean delivery. The findings suggest that elective (or voluntary) C-sections among low-risk women may pose a greater risk to the infant than vaginal delivery. At a time when the number of non-medically indicated Cesareans is rising, this study underscores the need for caution among those who believe that C-sections are safe enough to offer as a choice to women who had no medical need for the surgery.

Source: *Birth, September 2006 as seen in National Women's Health Network, November/December 2006*

♀ If you're looking for effective birth control, consider the intrauterine device (IUD). It's reliable, inexpensive, impossible to misuse, unlikely to cause complications, reversible, and you don't have to remember to use it. A major new review found that the standard IUD approved in the US, called Paragard, is the most effective one, with a pregnancy rate of less than 1 percent. However, if you have a history of pelvic inflammatory disease, have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or are at high risk for one due to multiple partners, or experience excessive menstrual bleeding, you are not a good candidate. An IUD cannot protect against STDs.

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, December 2006*

♀ Is your child getting enough sleep? More than half of all adolescents report feeling sleepy during the school day. While 35 percent of middle school students report getting an optimal amount of sleep on school nights, only 9 percent of high school students do. At least once a week, 28 percent of high school students report falling asleep in school, 22 percent report falling asleep while doing homework, and 14 percent report arriving late or missing school entirely because they oversleep.

Source: *National Sleep Foundation as seen in ADVANCE for Imaging and Radiation Therapy Professionals, January 22, 2007*

♀ Losing weight may reduce your risk of chronic diseases by reducing inflammation. Researchers from Johns Hopkins University and the University of Texas reviewed 28 studies in which people lost weight through lifestyle changes and five studies in which they lost weight through gastric surgery. No matter how it was achieved, a loss of at least two pounds was associated with a drop in blood levels of C-reactive protein (CPR), a marker for inflammation in the body. The more weight lost, the greater the drop in CPR. And a lower CPR reduces the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

Source: *Environmental Nutrition, March 2007*

♀ Move for More Memory...It's a fact: Certain areas of our brains shrink as we age, causing slower thinking and some memory loss. But three hours of brisk walking a week might stop, and even reverse this, finds a University of Illinois study that looked at 59 sedentary adults ages 60 to 80 who were put on either a walking or stretching-and-toning plan. After six months, MRI scans revealed that walkers' brains looked 2 to 3 years younger than others their age. A plan you can start today: Walk for 15 minutes three times this week, and add 5 minutes each consecutive week until you're up to one hour.

—Marianne McGinnis

Source: *Prevention, March 2007*

♀ One reason substance abuse is so serious to women is that women get addicted faster and with smaller amounts of drugs and alcohol than men. Abuse of prescription drugs overall is the fastest-growing category of substance abuse in women. Women, particularly Caucasian women, are far more likely to abuse prescription drugs than men or women of other ethnic backgrounds.

Source: *National Women's Health Report, December 2006*

♀ The long view...Staying active can help save our eyesight, say University of Wisconsin experts. They found that regular physical activity lowers the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) by as much as 70 percent. Exercise may control inflammation and blood vessel abnormalities that have been linked to the disease.

Source: *AARP, March & April 2007*