



# Women's Health

NEWSLETTER

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## Pregnancy Discrimination Reports at Record High

Reports of pregnancy discrimination to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) are at an all time high. The EEOC received 5,587 charges of pregnancy-based discrimination in 2007, up 14 percent from 2006 which represents the largest increase in a single year and a 40 percent increase over the last decade.

But the EEOC's call center got many more inquiries about the problem—20,400 in all, the *Wall Street Journal* reports. The advocacy group, 9to5, National Association of Working Women, is also reporting that more women who call its hotline are asking about pregnancy bias.

Elizabeth Grossman, an attorney for EEOC, told the *Wall Street Journal* that employers cannot fire women based on stereotypes like "now that you're pregnant, the best thing for you to do is raise your kid."

As a result of the discrimination, activism for new moms is growing. The Daily Women's Health Policy Report states that women are often unaware of what rights they have under the Pregnancy Discrimination Act. Many who call the hotlines believe they are entitled to paid leave under the federal law or special protection from firing. Instead the law merely requires employers to hold pregnant women to the same standards as men.

Activist groups, like MomsRising.org, have spoken out against maternal profiling. According to a new study by the US Census Bureau, women are working later into their pregnancies and taking shorter maternity leaves. In 2000, 67.2 percent of women worked during their pregnancies. The increased number of complaints of discrimination reflects the increased number of pregnant women in the workforce.

Source: Media Resources: Daily Women's Health Policy Report 03/27/08; The Wall Street Journal 03/27/08; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Feminist Newswire 02/09/08; MomsRising.org as seen in Feminist Daily News Wire, March 28, 2008; ABA Journal Law News Now, by Debra Cassens Weiss, March 27, 2008

## Exercise Nearly as Effective as Drugs for Depression

Among people diagnosed with major depression who are receptive and able to participate, exercise may be as effective as medications in relieving the symptoms of the condition. In a study reported in a 2007 issue of *Psychosomatic Medicine*, researchers assigned a group of 202 depressed adults to one of four groups: supervised group exercise three times a week; unsupervised exercise at home; medication (Zoloft) only, or placebo only. After 16 weeks, 47 percent of those on the antidepressant no longer met the criteria for depression, nor did 45 percent of those in supervised exercise group. Forty percent of the home exercise group went into remission, as did 31 percent of those in the placebo group. The authors speculate that the improvement in the supervised exercise group may be due to changes in nervous system chemicals, improved feelings of self-worth and positive thinking, or a response to the social benefits of group exercise.

Source: DukeMedicine Healthnews, February 2008

## Insulin and Type 1 Diabetes

Taking less insulin than required to control type 1 diabetes can cut a woman's lifespan by more than a decade, according to recent research. Fear of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and concern about gaining weight may lead patients with type 1 diabetes to restrict necessary insulin doses, Dr. Katie Weinger and colleagues note in a report in the journal *Diabetes Care*. In their 11-year follow-up study of 234 type 1 diabetic women, those who restricted their insulin intake had an increased risk of death as well as higher rates of kidney and foot problems relative to women who did not restrict their insulin dose.

Source: American Diabetes Association online at [news@diabetes.org](http://news@diabetes.org), March 13, 2008

## High Blood Pressure and Hot Flashes?

There may indeed be a link between high blood pressure (hypertension) and hot flashes, according to the results of a study published in the March/April 2007 issue of *Menopause: The Journal of the North American Menopause Society*. In fact, this may be the first study to suggest such a relationship.

In the study a portable monitor recorded the blood pressure of 154 women between 18 and 65 years of age (average age: 46). The women had no history of cardiovascular disease and had either normal blood pressure or mild hypertension. About a third of the women reported having had a hot flash within the previous two weeks. The average blood pressure among those women was significantly higher than among the women who hadn't experienced hot flashes, even when other risk factors for high blood pressure were taken into account. This was true whether the women were pre-menopausal, menopausal, or post-menopausal.

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease, and heart disease is a particularly serious health threat for women age 50 and older. Thus, researchers want to learn more about the relationship between high blood pressure and hot flashes, and reducing the impact hot flashes may have on a woman's blood pressure.

Source: Heart Care Health Monitor, December 2007/January 2008

## 3.2 Million Female Adolescents Estimated to Have at Least One of the Most Common STDs

A March study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 1 in 4 U.S. female teens have a sexually transmitted disease. The 2008 study evaluated 838 teens. Of those who admitted to having sex, 40 percent had an STD. The teens were tested for four infections: human papillomavirus, or HPV, which can cause cervical cancer and affected 18 percent of teens studied; chlamydia, which affected 4 percent; trichomoniasis, 2.5 percent; and genital herpes, 2 percent. Doctors attribute these results to abstinence-only sex education and teen insecurity. "Today's data demonstrate the significant health risk STDs pose to millions of young women in this country every year," said Kevin Fenton, M.D., director of CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention. "Given that the health effects of STDs for women—from infertility to cervical cancer—are particularly severe, STD screening, vaccination and other prevention strategies for sexually active women are among our highest public health priorities." Black female teens were hit the hardest. Nearly half who were tested had at least one STD compared to 20 percent of white and Mexican American teens. Health experts believe that the emphasis on abstinence-only sex education in the United States is contributing to the growing STD rates and that simple messages encouraging teens to use condoms can help with prevention. Teens need to hear the dual message that STDs can be prevented by abstinence and condoms, said Dr. Ellen Kruger, an obstetrician-gynecologist at Ochsner Medical Center in New Orleans. She told NPR "you've got to hammer at them" with appropriate information at each stage of teen development to make sure it sinks in.

Source: *Cheers and Jeers of the Week, Women's eNews, March 15, 2008, and CDC Press Release, March 11, 2008*

## Women Less Likely to Adopt Heart-Healthy Habits

Moms may have a reputation for taking care of everybody else, but they need to start taking better care of themselves, according to a study that shows women aren't as likely to change their habits to protect their hearts, even if heart disease runs in the family. Researchers reporting in the September issue of the *American Heart Journal* found that women with a family history of heart disease are less likely than men to change habits such as smoking and infrequent physical activity. Researchers said that women should pay special notice to these bad habits because they are twice as likely as men to have fatal heart attacks. In the study of more than 6,000 patients, researchers found that 40 percent of the women who used tobacco had a family history of heart disease, compared to only 25 percent of women with no such history.

Source: *Cleveland Clinic Heart Advisor, February 2008*

## Chatting with Friends Can Boost Your Brainpower

Talking with others can improve your cognitive functioning, new research suggests. Researchers at the University of Michigan assessed survey data to look at the connection between social interaction and mental functioning among 3,610 adults. They found subjects who reported higher levels of social interaction (such as getting together or talking on the telephone with neighbors, relatives and friends) performed better on tests of working memory, knowledge of personal information and current events. The more socializing, the better the cognitive functioning, researchers found. The study was published in the February issue of *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Source: *Massachusetts General Hospital Mind, Mood and Memory, February 2008*

## FDA Approves New Use for Evista

The FDA has approved the osteoporosis drug Evista (raloxifene) to reduce the risk of invasive breast cancer in postmenopausal women with osteoporosis. But changing osteoporosis drugs based solely on the FDA's decision isn't recommended. Invasive breast cancer is rare, and the drug also raises the risk of stroke and blood clots in the legs.

Source: [www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01698.html](http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01698.html) as seen in *The Johns Hopkins Medical Letter Health After 50, March 2008*

## Big Breakfast, Small Belly

People who get lots of their calories at breakfast tend to have a lower body mass index than others, according to a recent analysis of some 6,000 people. The big-breakfast eaters, who consumed 22 to 50 percent of their daily calories in the morning, gained less weight over time than people who tended to eat more as the day progressed. That may be because breakfast lends itself to filling, high-fiber foods like whole-grain cereal. Previous research suggests that successful dieters tend to eat breakfast every day.

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health, April 2008*

## Excess Weight & Cancer

A recent major report from the World Cancer Research Fund ([www.dietandcancerreport.org](http://www.dietandcancerreport.org)) found a convincing connection between excess weight and cancers of the colon, rectum, esophagus, pancreas, and kidney, as well as breast cancer in postmenopausal women. Obesity has also been linked to other cancers, or at least to the likelihood of dying from them. Though the risk is greatest with obesity, even smaller amounts of extra body fat, especially around the waist, increase the chances of developing cancer.

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, March 2008*

### BPW/NJ

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**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.

## Cancer Risk Persists After Ending Hormone Therapy



The increased risk of breast cancer associated with combination hormone therapy (estrogen plus progestin) may not go away once the hormones are stopped. More than two years after discontinuing hormones, women who had used the treatment for 5 years still had a higher risk of breast cancer than women who never used the hormones, according to an update from the Women's Health Initiative (WHI).

The results, in the March 5 *Journal of the American Medical Association*, confirm the main finding of the WHI's estrogen-plus-progestin trial - that the health risks of this treatment for menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes outweigh the benefits. The trial was halted in 2002 largely because women using hormones had an increased risk of breast cancer and experienced no clear health benefits. (A WHI trial of estrogen-alone therapy did not show increased cancer risks.) To update the findings, Dr. Gerardo Heiss of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and his colleagues tracked 95 percent of the original 16,608 trial participants for an additional 2.4 years. In the post-treatment period, women who had stopped taking hormones were 27 percent more likely to develop breast cancer than women who did not take hormones. However, this finding was not statistically significant (79 women in the post-treatment group developed breast cancer compared with 60 in the placebo group).

The risk of any type of cancer was 24 percent higher in women who had stopped taking hormones, and this was statistically significant (281 women in the post-treatment group developed cancer compared with 218 in the placebo group). The reasons for the additional cancers are not yet clear, but the researchers stress the importance of carefully monitoring women for any long-term effects of hormone use in the years

ahead. "When we started the WHI, the prevailing belief was that menopausal hormones were good for women and that we could prevent many major age-related diseases with them," said Dr. Marcia Stefanick of Stanford University, who chaired

the WHI steering committee during the trial.

"But we learned during the trial that the risks of combined estrogen-and-progestin therapy, which included increases in breast cancer, heart attacks, stroke, and serious blood clots, clearly outweighed the benefits of fewer fractures and colorectal cancers," Dr. Stefanick continued. "And we now know that the risk of cancer, and in particular, breast cancer, continues years after stopping the hormones, whereas, none of the benefits persist.

"The good news is that the cardiovascular risks for the most part disappear after stopping the combined hormone therapy. Still, many experts recommend that women avoid combined hormone therapy or minimize their exposure. Another WHI follow-up study recently showed that combined hormone therapy leads to abnormal mammograms and compromises the ability of mammograms and breast biopsies to detect cancers.

Together, the two reports highlight complementary downsides of this therapy. "Not only does the breast cancer risk not disappear once hormone therapy is stopped, but the sensitivity of mammograms to detect cancer is not as good and women may continue to have abnormal mammograms for at least a year," said Dr. Leslie Ford of NCI's Division of Cancer Prevention and the institute's WHI liaison.

*Source: National Cancer Institute Cancer Bulletin, March 4, 2008, Volume 5/Number 5*

## Low Levels of "Good" HDL Cholesterol May Impede Stroke Recovery

Researchers who followed 3,680 men and women over age 35 who had suffered a mild to moderate stroke found that those with low levels of "good" HDL cholesterol had greater difficulty recovering than those with normal levels. The patients were tested to measure cognition and disability about three months after their strokes and again two years later. Stroke survivors with low HDL levels were twice as likely as people with normal HDL levels to have poorer cognitive function and greater disability two years after their strokes, according to a report in the Nov. 27, 2007 issue of *Neurology*.

*Source: Massachusetts General Hospital Mind, Mood & Memory, February 2008*

## Nurses Face Bullying Fourteen Years

More than 50 percent of U.S. nurses face bullying in the workplace, according to a March survey by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. The study found that 90 percent of health care workers have witnessed abusive behavior against nurses, UPI reported March 24.

Physicians are the No. 1 hospital bullies, followed by other nurses, according to the study published in the *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic and Neonatal Nursing*. Patient satisfaction and care suffers as a result of disruptive behaviors, according to 75 percent of workers surveyed. The retention of qualified nurses is also affected and the emotional stress from verbal abuse hinders their ability to do their jobs.

*Source: Cheers and Jeers of the Week, Women's eNews, March 29, 2008*

That's how much longer you'll probably live if you exercise regularly, eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, don't smoke, and drink alcohol moderately, according to British researchers. They looked at more than 20,000 men and women between the ages of 45 and 79.

Participants were given 1 point for each healthy habit they had; those with a perfect 4 lived an average, almost a decade and a half longer than those who scored a zero. Stubbing out the smoking habit had the single greatest effect. Even people with chronic diseases such as cancer or heart disease who adopted good habits live longer.

*Source: Consumer Reports on Health, April 2008*

# HOT flashes

♀ Eat breakfast within an hour of waking... “When you wake up in the morning, your body is producing just enough cortisol to make you feel alert,” explains Dr. Peeke. But from there, cortisol levels rise, putting women at risk for anxiety-induced overeating. To offset the effect, have a protein-packed bite within an hour of waking. “By responding to this A.M. cortisol rush with healthy, satisfying fare, you’ll ward off overwhelming cravings later,” she says.

Source: *First*, March 17, 2008

♀ There are ample reasons to manage your weight. Arthritis, diabetes and heart disease are all a threat to overweight women. Now you can add breast cancer to the list. Recent research has shown that women who are overweight have a much higher chance of developing and dying from breast cancer. In fact, one study suggests that excess weight is to blame for 30 to 50 percent of breast cancer deaths.

Source: *Somerset Health Living Medical Center Newsletter*, April 2008

♀ “Cutting carbs” may help trim your waistline and maintain your vision. Researchers at Tufts University analyzed the dietary habits of 4,099 people with age-related macular degeneration and found that participants who ate the most refined carbohydrates, such as cookies, candy, pasta, white bread, and crackers, were 17 percent more likely to go blind than those who consumed the least refined carbs. Try eating complex carbohydrates like brown rice and whole wheat bread.

Source: *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, vol. 86, p. 1210 as seen in *The Johns Hopkins Medical Letter Health After 50*, March 2008

♀ Flip your fat-fighting switch...get out of the chair! Staying on your feet revs metabolism and doubles your calorie burn during workdays, a study in *Diabetes* reports. Sitting for a few hours switches off enzymes that capture fat in the bloodstream, but rising reignites them. Surrender your seat when possible (e.g., during phone calls) to start reaping benefits.

Source: *SELF*, April 2008

♀ Snoring Danger...Men and women who frequently snore are far more likely to develop bronchitis than non-snorers. It’s possible that vibrations from snoring increase airway inflammation.

Source: *Bottom Line Health*, April 2008

♀ Exercise after arthritis hospital stay cuts costs...Arthritis sufferers who participate in three weeks of intensive exercise therapy after being hospitalized for their disease enjoy a better quality of life a full year after the treatment than those who don’t, Dutch researchers report.

Source: *Arthritis & Rheumatism*, February 15, 2008 as seen *Online MyRACentral*, March 4, 2008

♀ The vitamin C in citrus juice increases the body’s absorption of green tea’s catechins by 400 percent. That’s good news since these antioxidants help guard against cancer. To reap the benefits, drink green tea with a twist of lemon.

Source: *First*, March 17, 2008

♀ If you’re very overweight, it’s especially important to do aerobic exercise, even if it doesn’t produce weight loss. Both obesity and physical inactivity increase the risk of chronic disease and premature death. But people who are fit (based on treadmill test) live longer, on average, than those who are unfit, regardless of how overweight they are, according to a recent study of 2,600 people over 60 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. In fact, “fat but fit” people had lower death rates than unfit normal-weight or lean people.

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter*, March 2008

♀ Meditation as effective as blood pressure meds...University of Kentucky doctors report that practicing meditation can lower blood pressure by five points in two weeks—results that are on par with some blood pressure meds. Meditation works by lowering levels of hypertension-causing hormones like cortisol.

Source: *James W. Anderson, M.D., professor of medicine and clinical nutrition, University of Kentucky, Lexington*, as seen in *First*, April 7, 2008

♀ Texans’ love of barbecue is literally in the air: A study by Rice University found airborne particles of cooked meat contributing to the smog in Houston.

Source: *Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter*, March 2008

♀ Tilt Your Head for Better Hearing... Can’t comprehend a mumblor’s words at a crowded party? Lean in with your right ear: It sends messages to your left brain, which is better at following rapid speech rhythms than your right brain, say UCLA researchers. Trying to pick out the lyrics of a new song? Use your left ear—the right brain is better at processing musical tones. —By Amanda MacMillan, a *Prevention* associate editor.

Source: *www.prevention.com*, 1/15/08

♀ A University of Washington study has found that 15- to 19-year-olds who have had comprehensive sex education rather than abstinence-only education are less likely to become pregnant, the *Seattle Times* reported March 25. Neither form of sex education appeared to affect teens’ risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection.

Source: *Women’s eNews, Cheers & Jeers of the Week*, March 29, 2008

♀ Ignore ads for special dietary supplements “tailored to your prescription.” They claim that popular medications (including statins, antidepressants, and drugs for diabetes, heartburn, and pain relief) reduce key nutrients, which these formulas will “replenish.” There’s no evidence that such supplements—mostly high doses of ordinary vitamins—are necessary or beneficial.

Source: *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter*, February 2008

♀ Physical activity linked to better cognitive performance...People who have been physically active in their lives have much better cognitive functioning, according to a study in the October issue of *Aging Clinical Experimental Research*. In the study, 364 people in their 80s were questioned about past and present physical activity. Forty-three percent had a history of high-intensity physical activity during their youth, although it was lower during adulthood and old age. Nevertheless, people with a history of high-intensity physical activity at any time in their lives had a much lower cognitive performance study (CPS) score (indicating better performance) than participants who did not have a history of high-intensity physical activity.

Source: *Weill Cornell Medical College, Iris Cantor Women’s Health Center, Food & Fitness Advisor*, February 2008