



# Women's Health

NEWSLETTER

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## Women with Strokes Less Likely to Get Crucial Tests and Treatments

Women who survive a stroke aren't getting as many key tests of heart and neck arteries as men and may miss out on treatments that could prevent a second stroke, according to a study from the University of Michigan. The study, which examined a random sample of medical records from more than 1,200 stroke patients treated in Texas community hospitals, found women were 36 percent less likely than men to have an echocardiogram to look for clot-producing problems and 43 percent less likely to have exams of their carotid arteries. About 88 percent of all strokes are ischemic, caused by blood clots traveling to the brain or by blockages in the carotid arteries. While those tests seem to be underused in all stroke patients, the gender difference may help explain women's worse long-term outcome from strokes, including a higher death rate, says the study in the September 27 issue of the journal *Neurology*.

Source: Weill Medical College of Cornell University, Women's Health Advisor, December 2005

## Diabetes Linked with Risk of Sudden Cardiac Death

Diabetes is a "strong" risk factor for sudden cardiac death, with the risk increasing with the severity of the disease, according to a study published in the *European Heart Journal*.

"The prevalence of diabetes mellitus in industrialized countries is rapidly increasing, and diabetes is suspected to carry a particularly high risk for sudden cardiac death," Dr. Xavier Jouven, of Universite Paris-5, France, and colleagues write.

The researchers examined the association between blood glucose level, diabetes, and the risk of sudden cardiac death among individuals enrolled in the Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound. The study included 2,040 subjects who experienced out-of-hospital cardiac arrest between 1980 and 1994. They were compared with 3,800 control subjects, derived from a random sample of enrollees.

Source: *Diabetes E-News Now!* (American Diabetes Association online), November 2005

## Choose Safer Seafood

The high levels of omega-3 fatty acids in some fish make it great for your heart, but limit your consumption of imported shrimp, catfish and tilapia as well as farm-raised salmon. These fish can be contaminated with hormones, PCBs, antibiotics, pesticides, dyes and other chemicals, says the Center for Food Safety in Washington, DC. Also, the larger the fish, the longer the time it has had to accumulate toxins like mercury in its body. These toxins can harm the neurological development of a young child or a pregnant woman's unborn baby. So avoid large fish like shark, swordfish, tilefish and king mackerel. Pregnant women (or those planning to be) and young children can safely eat 12 ounces of canned light tuna a week. Other healthier catches (for everyone) include wild Alaska salmon, U.S. Tilapia and catfish, and northern (Newfoundland) or U.S. shrimp.

Source: *Family Circle*, November 18, 2005

## Caution for Cranberry Juice and Coumadin

Cranberry juice can cause bleeding in patients taking the blood-thinning drug warfarin (Coumadin). *New Finding:* Cranberry juice boosts the potency of the drug and may increase the risk for hemorrhage. *Theory:* Cranberry juice contains flavonoids, antioxidants known to inhibit the activity of cytochrome P-450, an enzyme that breaks down warfarin. This results in greater anticoagulation effect. *If you take warfarin:* Avoid cranberry juice and other cranberry products. *Important:* Do not drastically change your diet without consulting your physician.

Source: Jacquelyn L. Bainbridge, PharmD, associate professor of clinical pharmacy, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver, as seen in *Bottom Line health*, August 2005

## Breaking Your Arm Cuts Your Cancer Risk?

It's hard to see a broken bone as a reason to celebrate, but it turns out there may be an upside: Women who have had fractures appear to have lower odds of ovarian cancer, Harvard University researchers say. That's also true if you've had mastitis (a common infection caused by breast-feeding), use an IUD, or take birth-control pills. These seemingly random experiences cause your body to make an antibody that helps fight fledgling cancer cells, lowering risk by as much as 30 to 65 percent. Ultimately, the finding could lead to the development of an ovarian-cancer vaccine.

Source: *Health*, October 2005

## New Smoking Risk

Here's another health reason to talk to your kids about smoking: It increases their chance of developing a dangerous condition that boosts both heart disease and diabetes risk. A new study of 12- to 19-year-olds found that smoking—and even being exposed to secondhand smoke—ups the risk of metabolic syndrome, a cluster of symptoms including belly fat and high blood pressure. Nearly one-quarter of overweight children in the study who smoked met the syndrome's criteria. Tobacco is associated with insulin resistance and high cholesterol, other hallmarks of metabolic syndrome.

Source: *Family Circle*, November 18, 2005

# Aspirin, NSAID and OTC Pain Relievers

## Are They Safe for You?

### ASPIRIN

Even low-dose aspirin increases the risk of gastrointestinal bleeding, but the risk is much lower than for higher doses, according to a recent analysis of 31 studies. It compared daily doses of less than 100 milligrams (that includes the dose typically used to protect against heart attacks—81 milligrams, the amount in one-quarter tablet or a “baby” aspirin), 100 to 200 milligrams, and more than 200 milligrams (that includes the standard 325-milligram tablet). The lowest doses are about 60 percent less likely to cause bleeding than the highest doses, but provide comparable heart benefits. Not everyone needs aspirin therapy, so talk to your doctor before starting it.

Source: University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, October 2005

### NSAID and Aspirin Use Increase GI Bleeding Risk

Patients who combine the over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers ibuprofen or naproxen with aspirin double or triple their risk of serious gastrointestinal side effects.

According to a study presented during a recent meeting of the American College of Gastroenterology, 38,507 patients on ibuprofen (200mg/day) and 11,957 patients on naproxen (200mg/day) were shown, respectively, to have 2.5 to 2.74 greater risk of experiencing such stomach problems as ulcers, perforations, or bleeding than those who did

not take the pain-relievers. An examination of sub-groups of ibuprofen and naproxen users who also took aspirin showed an even greater risk of serious GI problems—3.4 times greater than patients who took ibuprofen alone, and two times greater than those who took naproxen alone.

Researchers concluded that aspirin not only significantly increases the risk of gastrointestinal problems among patients using ibuprofen and naproxen, but that the practice of adding aspirin to painkillers to mitigate cardiovascular risks has become all too common. The study’s recommendation: Take a daily aspirin, in addition to your pain-reliever, if you’re at risk for heart disease. If you’re not, taking aspirin will increase your risk of gastrointestinal problems.

Source: The Cleveland Clinic Arthritis Advisor, January 2006

### Link Found Between Over-the-Counter Pain Relievers and Hypertension

If you take a generous daily dose of acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Naprosyn) for any type of ache or pain, you may be increasing your risk of developing hypertension. Researchers have confirmed the connection, and in doing so, surprised a lot of people who thought acetaminophen was safe. Their study reported in a recent issue of *Hypertension*, included 1,903 women ages 51 to 77 who participated in the Nurses’ Health Study I, and 3,220 women ages 34 to 53 in the Nurses’ Health Study II. None had hypertension at baseline. Compared with women who did not use acetaminophen, older women who took more than 500 mg of acetaminophen daily had 1.93 times the risk of developing hypertension. In younger women, the risk was nearly double. Risks were only slightly less for older and younger women who took the same amount of ibuprofen. No link was found between aspirin use and hypertension.

Source: HealthNews, December 2005

### When to Take Low-Dose Aspirin

Heart attack prevention may be enhanced by taking low-dose aspirin in the late evening, we hear from Jack M. Rosenberg, PharmD, PhD. Heart attacks occur most often in the early morning, when platelet activity (tendency for clotting) increases due to the body’s natural circadian (24-hour) rhythm. If your doctor has prescribed aspirin therapy, taking it around 10 pm provides peak anticlotting action by early morning.

Source: Jack M. Rosenberg, PharmD, PhD, professor of pharmacology and pharmacy, Long Island University, Brooklyn, New York, as seen in *Bottom Line health*, January 2006

### A New Wrinkle

Botox boxes migraine headaches—and knocks them out. Researchers at the Houston Headache Clinic showed that Botox injections provide long-term relief from migraines. During a three-year period, 208 patients injected on or near the scalp 10 to 35 times with the botulinum toxin experienced a significant reduction in the severity and frequency of headaches. After treatment stopped, the intensity and frequency of their migraines did not return to former levels.

Source: *Arthritis Today*, November-December 2005

### Read labels carefully

Due to labeling loopholes, many “natural” and “organic” personal-care products in the United States contain hazardous chemicals, some of which, at high exposures, have been shown to cause cancer, birth defects, damage to nervous and reproductive systems and liver damage in lab animals. Read labels and choose hair-care products that are free of the following four hazardous chemicals: phthalates, parabens, coal tar and sodium lauryl sulfate.

Source: *The Green Guide: Tip of the Week*, September 28, 2005

## Word Test May Reveal Early Alzheimer's Disease

Scientists have devised a simple word test that may make it possible to diagnose Alzheimer's Disease (AD) in its initial stages. In a study in which subjects were asked to list as many fruits and animals as possible in a one-minute period, scientists found significant differences between 40 healthy individuals and 96 people with early AD. The subjects came from similar backgrounds and had an average age of 77, researchers reported at a British Association science meeting on September 6, 2005. While healthy people could list 20 to 25 words, study subjects with early AD were able to list only 10 to 15. What's more, the AD patients tended to remember familiar words such as dog, cat and bird, but forgot less familiar words listed by healthy subjects, such as giraffe, zebra, and badger. The findings might lead to a simple test for identifying people at risk for being in the early stages of AD when drug treatments for the disorder are probably most effective.

Source: *Mind, Mood & Memory, Massachusetts General Hospital, December 2005*

## The Test You Shouldn't Do Without

No one likes the idea of a colonoscopy (we'd be worried if you did). But it's the best way for a typical woman to find out whether she has polyps that can lead to cancer, according to a new study of more than 1,400 women at military medical centers. Less uncomfortable alternatives like sigmoidoscopy (think mini-colonoscopy) and fecal blood tests are OK for men, but researchers found that these tests miss a whopping 65 percent of polyps in women. While men's polyps typically crop up in the lower part of the colon, women's grow in the upper section, where only colonoscopy can reach. Whatever test you choose, guidelines advise starting at age 50, or earlier if you have a family history of colon cancer.

Source: *Health, October 2005*

## More May Be Better

While practice may not always make perfect, it certainly seems to help, according to a recent study of angioplasty procedures. Although the American Heart Association recommends using a doctor who has performed at least 75 angioplasties a year, this new study, which looked at results of 18,504 procedures done in 2002, suggests that more may be better. Patients of doctors who performed more than the recommend 75 angioplasties a year required fewer bypass surgeries and repeat angioplasties and suffered fewer strokes before leaving the hospital than those whose doctors had performed fewer than 75 angioplasties per year.

Source: *The Johns Hopkins Medical Letter Health After 50, December 2005*

## Decaf May Harm the Heart

Drinking decaffeinated coffee might not be easier on your heart, says a study presented at the American Heart Association's annual scientific sessions. That's because when researchers asked 187 people to drink three to six cups of regular black coffee, decaf, or neither beverage every day for three months, the decaf drinkers had 8 to 18 percent higher levels of a type of blood lipid considered a precursor to LDL ("bad") cholesterol. Although these findings are preliminary, scientists think that the Robusta coffee beans used in decaf to enhance its taste have higher concentrations of fat.

Comment: A daily cup or two of coffee doesn't appear to be harmful to the heart, but higher intakes of caffeinated or decaf might be. I [Dr. Andrew Weil] think you're better off drinking tea, which has proven health benefits.

Source: *Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing, January 2006*



## Stem-Cell Breakthrough for Spinal Injuries

Despite the controversy surrounding fetal stem-cell research, a new study has produced strong evidence that therapeutic use of stem cells can help restore motor skills lost from spinal cord damage.

Researchers found that, when injected into paralyzed mice, embryonic stem cells led to a recovery of motor skills. Researchers used a technique that caused the stem cells to differentiate into early-stage oligodendrocyte cells. Oligodendrocytes are the building blocks of the myelin sheath, a layer of insulative cells that nerve fibers need to communicate with the brain. The treatment, reported in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, was successful in restoring the tissue in mice treated seven days after initial injury; within two months, the mice showed significant improvement in walking ability. The same treatment, however, did not work on mice that had been injured for 10 months, pointing to the advantage of using stem-cell therapy in humans suffering spinal cord damage during the early stages of injury.

Researchers are now seeking Food and Drug Administration approval to test the technique on humans.

Source: *The Cleveland and Clinic Arthritis Advisor, December 2005*

### BPW/NJ

#### Women's Health Newsletter

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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.**

# HOT flashes

♀ Another reason to get a hearing aid if you need one: mild-to-moderate hearing loss can interfere with short-term memory of spoken language. In a study at Brandeis University, published in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, researchers found that even though a group of hearing-impaired older people could hear a list of words, they remembered fewer words than older people with good hearing. The extra effort to hear the words probably interfered with the mental resources needed to memorize them, the researchers suggested.

Source: University of California, Berkeley  
Wellness Letter, January 2006

♀ Overtime overkill... Don't feel guilty if you leave work on time. Whatever your job, logging extra hours can up your chance for injury and illness by 61 percent, researchers from the University of Massachusetts at Worcester say.

Source: SELF, January 2006

♀ Out of breath? See your doctor. A study of 17,991 patients showed those short of breath were four times likelier to die from cardiac causes within three years.

Source: Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter,  
January 2006

♀ Purple grape juice has some of the same heart benefits as red wine, according to a small study from Boston University School of Medicine. It found that people with heart disease who drank about two cups of Concord grape juice a day for two weeks had an increase in HDL ("good") cholesterol and a decrease in two markers of inflammation. The researchers attribute the benefits to polyphenols in purple grape juice, also found in red wine. (Of course, grape juice lacks alcohol, and alcohol itself, at least in moderation, is known to have heart benefits.) But watch out for calories, a cup of grape juice contains 150 calories, more than most juices.

Source: University of California, Berkeley  
Wellness Letter, October 2005

♀ If you've been tired lately, skip Jon Stewart and hop into bed. People who are very fatigued and irritable are more apt to have unhealthy habits such as smoking and inactivity, a study in the journal *Cancer* notes. Both bad traits may up your disease risk.

Source: Self, December 2005

♀ Medical Test Caution... Drinking coffee before undergoing diagnostic image testing for the heart can skew results, reports Medhat Osman, MD, PhD. He found that caffeine's ability to speed heart rate increases myocardial uptake, raising the amount of dye that enters the heart to provide a picture of it during positron emission tomography (PET) or computed tomography (CT) scans. The result: an obscured view that prevents identification of potential problems. For best results, avoid coffee for 24 hours before a test.

Source: Medhat Osman, MD, PhD, Director of PET Imaging, Saint Louis University Hospital, as seen in  
First, October 17, 2005

♀ For people with type 2 diabetes, carefully balanced meals are central to controlling blood glucose levels. Eating the correct amount of "good" fats, such as polyunsaturated fats, is an important part of eating the right portions from each food group. A recent study from Australia suggests that eating 1 oz. of walnuts every day can help provide these healthy fats. Walnuts contributed even more to a balanced diet when fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, like tuna and salmon, were also on the menu.

Source: The Johns Hopkins Medical Letter Health After  
50, December 2005

♀ Upside of allergies... Being plagued by sniffing, sneezing and wheezing may actually reduce your risk of dying from any cancer by as much as 10 percent, a study in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* reports. Researchers speculate that allergy sufferers may have a better immune surveillance system, which can seek out—and destroy—rogue cells before they grow out of control.

Source: Self, December 2005

♀ Individuals who consumed the most processed meat had a nearly 70 percent higher risk of pancreatic cancer compared to those with the lowest intake.

Source: Life Extension, January 2006

♀ Removing trans fats from the food supply could prevent 30,000 heart-related deaths in the U.S. each year. [Starting January 1, 2006, all packaged foods that enter interstate commerce in the U.S. must list trans fat content on their Nutrition Facts labels.]

Source: Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing, January 2006

♀ Water Treatment... Yes, dentists recommend brushing after every meal, but toting your toothbrush along to a restaurant seems a little too fastidious. When post-meal brushing isn't convenient, simply swishing water around in your mouth is a good compromise. Rinsing with water neutralizes the acids left after eating and reduces bacteria by 30 percent—about half of brushing's tally, according to the Academy of General Dentistry.

Source: AOL Living Tips, October 17, 2005

♀ Feel the Burn... Need additional motivation to avoid overeating? Consider this: Being overweight nearly doubles your risk for gastric reflux and being obese almost triples it, scientists from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston say. Extra belly fat can compress your stomach and push its contents back into your esophagus, sparking reflux's telltale heartburn.

Source: Self, December 2005

♀ Don't eat raw sprouts, especially if you are in frail health or have an impaired immune system—that's still the advice of the FDA. And don't feed sprouts to young children. This includes not only alfalfa sprouts, but also red clover, wheat, radish, soybean, mung, broccoli, and others, including organic sprouts. The problem: the seeds themselves may be contaminated by Salmonella and E. coli bacteria, and the bacteria grow as the sprouts germinate. Simply washing the sprouts doesn't help. The only way to ensure safety is to cook sprouts thoroughly, but that destroys the most appealing qualities of salad sprouts.

Source: University of Berkeley, Wellness Letter,  
October 2005

♀ America's Best Hospitals  
U.S. News & World Report has their own online directory with facts and figures on more than 6,000 hospitals. Also, get tips on how to choose the right facility. Go to [www.usnews.com/besthospitals](http://www.usnews.com/besthospitals).