News and Notes  Henry N. Yokoyama MD

MEDICAL TIDBITS

Researchers at the Framingham Heart Study tracked 6859 people with normal blood pressures for 12 years. They found that people in the so-called high normal group (between 130 to 139 over 85 to 89) were two times likelier to suffer heart attacks, strokes or heart failure (than those with optimal pressure below 120/80.) Experts want to see if this group would benefit from medication.

Macular degeneration causes blindness in many cases and there is little we can do to stop it... now there is hope... Doctors at the National Eye Institute ranked 3,650 patients by the stage of their disease... (early, intermediate, and advanced). Some were started on supplements viz Vit C (500 mg), Vit E (400 i.u.), Beta carotene (15 mg), Zinc (8 mg), and copper (2 mg) and others got a placebo. Those in more advanced stages, the risk of vision could deteriorate fell by 25%. Ophthalmologist Frederick Ferris who directs the study says: "If the approximately 6 million people in those categories took supplements, we would save 300,000 from developing advanced macular degeneration.

The Japanese eat little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans... The French eat a lot of fat and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans... Conclusion: Eat and drink what you like... Speaking English is apparently what kills you.

A study sponsored by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) showed that mild diuretics are the least expensive when treating high blood pressure... and also the most effective as well.

With more than 43,000 participants, the NHLBI investigation is the largest ever conducted in the study of hypertension. The study compared with the newer anti-hypertensives i.e. Ace inhibitors, calcium channel blockers with thiazide diuretics... The diuretics were just as effective as ACE inhibitors and calcium channel blockers and associated with fewer complications. Diuretics cost $25 per year compared to $250 for ACE inhibitors and $500 for calcium channel blockers.

Nuts: health food for the heart?
The Physicians’ Health Study (a long term analysis of the diet, health and exercise habits of 22,000 doctors). Researchers at Harvard Medical School found that men who ate a couple of handfuls of nuts each week had a 47% lower risk of sudden death from cardiac arrest... Munching nuts may also protect against dementia (according to a recent study from the Rush Institute in Chicago).

BOTOX Injections: (A purified form of the neurotoxin that causes botulism)
FDA has approved the injection of BOTOX for wrinkles — 13 studies presented at the annual meeting of the American Headache Society reported that BOTOX injections can also help chronic headaches and migraine with very few side effects.

Women’s Life Expectancy:
The US Department of Health and Human Services reported that the life expectancy of women set a new record of 79.5 years in the year 2000.

Early Ovarian Cancer Detection:
Ovarian cancer diagnosed early has a 95% five year survival... However there has not been a reliable test for early ovarian cancer detection... Only 1/4 are discovered early enough and the survival rate drops to 30%.

A new blood test which detects 100% of Stage 1 tumors is being developed which could lead to life saving screening techniques.

PMS Relief:
Millions of women with PMS may have relief with a new nasal spray being tested at Michigan U and seven screening institutions.

The Chemistry of Love:
Prof Martha McClintock at the Univ of Chicago (who studies odor and behavior) reports a new study which links sexual activity and odor (e.g. a T-shirt worn by a man on two consecutive days)...

Re: Alzheimer’s:
A long term study of 678 School Sisters of Notre Dame showed that something as simple and non-medical as a handwritten message, penned in youth may be able to predict a person’s chance of getting Alzheimer’s later in life. Some other study findings: a. protection of the brain from higher education during young adulthood; b. constant mental activity like playing card games or teaching in one’s golden years.

Artificial Heart:
ABIO MED: A Massachusetts based bioengineering company developed the ABIO COR (a self contained device) which was implanted in six terminally ill patients.

ALS: (Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis is showing up in Gulf War veterans at twice the rate in other military personnel... (per the Defense Department and the VA)

Aspirin: Taking Ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) blocks Aspirin’s blood thinning ability 98%... But aspirin does not cancel the pain killing effects of ROFECOXIB and acetaminophen.

BAYCOL: Baycol was pulled off the market in Fall because patients were suffering from muscular disorders... The other statins remain safe according to the FDA.

By Pass Surgery: More than 500,000 by pass surgeries are performed in the U.S. each year. A Duke University study reveals that 1/3 of the patients have cognitive decline... esp older and less educated patients.

CIPRO: The antibiotic was catapulted to pharmaceutical stardom by the anthrax attacks because FDA approved it for treating anthrax until other antibiotics such as doxycycline and penicillin were found to be just as effective.

The APCs of Colon Cancer testing:
With 150,000 new diagnoses every year, colon cancer is the third most common cancer in the U.S... Researchers at the Kimmel Cancer Center at John Hopkins have hit on a technique that’s completely noninvasive and could eliminate unnecessary colonoscopies... Colon cancer is marked by changes in a gene called APC. By testing for these mutations in stool samples, molecular biologist Bert Vogelstein and colleagues were able to identify cancer in 61% of patients with early stage cancer and 50% of those with precancerous growths... “The test should be out in a few years,” says Vogelstein.

Diabetes & Booze:
Scientists at the Harvard School of Public Health followed 2419 diabetic men over a ten year period. They discovered that those who drank 1 1/2 to 2 servings of beer, wine or liquor a day decreased their likelihood of heart disease by 38%... Alcohol in moderation raises good cholesterol levels but diabetics who over indulge amplify their risks for hypertension and blindness.
St. John's Wort:
In 2000, Americans spent $170 million on St. John’s Wort to treat depression. The FDA has issued a public health advisory warning that St. John’s Wort may weaken birth control pills and interfere with drugs used to treat cancer, heart disease, HIV and seizures.

Vitamin A:
New research suggests women who get too much Vit A (in the form of retinol) have a higher risk of hip fracture. Researchers at Harvard Medical School checked the Vit A levels in 72,337 women in the Nurse’s Health Study... Women who got more than 2000 micrograms a day of retinol nearly doubled their risk of hip fracture.

Botox: (Botulinium toxin) (The anti-wrinkle shots approved by FDA):
Already the most popular cosmetic procedure in the U.S. (About 1.6 million Americans got shots last year) FDA approved the Allergan product for removal of certain wrinkles (by interrupting nerve impulses in the face for $500 per treatment q 6 months).

Heart Monitor:
A study of 1500 patients at the San Diego VA showed that measuring the heart hormone BNP test costs $20 and is used in 10% of U.S. hospitals.

Mind Over Muscle:
About 30% of by pass patients suffer from “pump head”, a mental fog that physicians blamed on the heart lung machines... Researchers have now found no difference in memory, attention and motor skills one year after surgery.

The Vulnerable Plaque:
Physicians attending the recent American College of Cardiology in Atlanta presented data suggesting that as many as 80% of heart attacks are caused by “vulnerable plaques” (soft plaques which are buried in the arterial wall and are harder to detect). Researchers feel that the STATINS seem to pull out the vulnerable plaques from the fatty deposits of the artery.

Folic Acid:
Folic acid is best known for its role in preventing spina bifida and other birth defects... Now comes word that the vitamin may help in Alzheimer’s disease... The New England Journal reports a study of 1000 older adults at the Boston and Tufts Universities that found that patients with high levels of homocystine were twice as likely to develop Alzheimer’s... (One of the easiest ways to lower homocysteine levels is to get plenty of folic acid).

Anatomy of Breast Cancer:
Source: Time, Feb. 18, 2002

A. Precancerous: Atypical ductal hyperplasia
B. Stage 0: DCIS with micro calcifications...
Outlook: No one dies of breast CA within 5 years of therapy of DCIS...
Stage I: Invasive ductal cancer... Tumor 2 cm or less; spills out of duct... No cancer in lymph nodes...
Options: Mastectomy of lumpectomy plus radiation. Chemo therapy or Tamoxifen recommended for some women...
Outlook: 95 to 98% of women doing fine 5 years after treatment.
Stage II: Definition: Tumors 2 to 5 cm insize... Not spread to nodes...
Options: mastectomy of lumpectomy plus radiation... Chemotherapy when cancer has spread to nodes... Tamoxifen for those tumors that respond to estrogen.
Outlook: 76 to 88% of women live 5 years after diagnosis.
Stage III: Definition: Cancer in lymph nodes... Even tumors less that 1 cm in size when several nodes involved...
Options: Mastectomy or lumpectomy plus radiation... Chemotherapy, Tamoxifen for those cancers that respond to estrogen.
Stage IV: The cancer has spread beyond the breast, to the liver, lungs, brain, etc.
Options: Treatment to relieve symptoms or prolong life for a few months or years... Chemotherapy: Herceptin; Tamoxifen or Aromatase inhibitors.
Outlook: Average survival of 18 to 24 months... 15 to 20% live 5 years after diagnosis.

Bosom Buddies:
12 years ago, researchers announced that breast cancer patients participating in support groups coped better and lived longer than those who did not participate... A larger and more comprehensive study now shows that support groups do not prolong life, but the sessions help control pain and the accompanying depression and anxiety.

Hot Flashes: (re hormone replacement therapy)
A study shows that women on hormones more than 5 years increases the risk of developing all types of breast cancer by 70%... HRT was thought to prevent heart disease in women, but two other studies have challenged the concept.

Not For The Elderly:
JAMA reports that 7 million senior citizens (1/5 of the population age 65 or older) take drugs listed below which can be detrimental to their health:

a. Flurazepam (Dalmane, Seconal)
b. Meprobamates
c. Chlorpropamide (Diabenese)
d. Meperidine (Demerol)
e. Pentazocine (Talwin)
f. Trimethobenzamide (Tigan)
g. Diclofenac (Benadryl)
h. Hycynamine (Bentyl)
i. Propanthaline (Probanthine)
j. Barbiturates
k. Belladona alkaloids (atropine)

Sex? (No Sweat):
There have been more than 100 cases of men suffering heart attacks while on VIAGRA... Studies funded by PFIZER has determined that the drug poses no risk to men with stable hearts, but stay off the pill if you had a recent heart attack or the heart disease is severe or you are on nitrates.

POISONS!

POISON CENTER
941-4411
So Do POISONS!