

Health Nuggets for August '10

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1. **MENTAL HEALTH CAN IMPROVE WITH AGE.** Except for people with dementia-related conditions, emotional happiness tends to improve with age. Older adults exert greater emotional control than younger adults such as avoiding negative, stressful situations. However, chronic stressful conditions, such as caregiving or a debilitating disease can lead to greater emotional distress. We need to envision the years ahead as happy and healthy ones. We can make efforts to design our social and physical environment (home, spending habits, eating habits, interactions with friends and family) to meet our goals.
2. **PILL SPLITTING IS RISKY BUSINESS.** The FDA cautions against the practice of splitting pills, except when the pill is already scored being able to divide it equally. Some tablets are too small or may crumble or the split tablet is not always equal. Also time-release drugs should not be cut.
3. **FLU TRIGGERS HEART ATTACKS, BUT FLU SHOTS MAY OFFER PROTECTION.** *The Lancet* reviewed 39 studies over the past 70 years. They showed an increase in deaths due to heart disease or incidence of heart attacks during periods of time when the flu virus was widely circulating. The proportion of influenza deaths due to heart disease averaged 35-50% higher than when the virus was not as prevalent. Heart patients vaccinated against influenza had a reduced incidence of cardiovascular events and death.
4. **THREE WEEKS OF RADIATION MAY WORK AS WELL AS LONGER TREATMENT FOR BREAST CANCER.** With early-stage breast cancer, surgery is followed by 5-7 weeks of radiation. The American Society for Radiation Oncology in Nov 2009 suggests that a 3 week course of more intensive radiation therapy results in comparable outcomes. 112 women received accelerated whole-breast irradiation plus a simultaneous boost dose in the area where their tumor was. The cancer did not return and survival was greater than 95% for patients with five years of follow-up. Also there were no significant physical or cosmetic side effects from the radiation treatment. Women with early-stage breast cancer should ask their oncologists whether it is suitable for them.
5. **HIGH-DEFINITION COLONOSCOPY FINDS MORE PRECANCEROUS POLYPS.** The American College of Gastroenterology reports that it is more sensitive than

standard colonoscopy. A high-definition endoscope uses a video chip and HD monitors that increase the resolution of the image. The study involved 2,011 patients. The HD equipment found 29% adenomas compared with 24% with standard endoscopes. Many clinics have both kinds so it shouldn't be difficult to move to the newer, better technology.

6. **TWO-THIRDS OF MEN WITH PROSTATE CANCER DO NOT NEED AGGRESSIVE TREATMENT.** In the *British Journal of Cancer*, Sept 2009, findings were published that there is a marker for a progressive form of prostate cancer called Hsp027. A study at the University of Liverpool involved 500 of 4,000 prostate cancer patients over 15-year period. This protein indicates that the disease will progress rapidly and require treatment. However, the protein was not present in more than 60% of the cases studied, an indication that the cancer can be managed by careful monitoring instead of more aggressive treatment such as chemotherapy or surgery. Men with non-aggressive prostate cancer can live with the disease untreated for many years.