

## Health Nuggets May 2014

- Effective relief for hip and knee arthritis pain: Think you shouldn't exercise because of your knee or hip arthritis? Think again if your arthritis is mild to moderate. Your best bet for pain relief may be strengthening and flexibility exercises. In an analysis of 60 randomized trials, published in Sept 20, 2013, in *BMJ*, researchers concluded that strengthening and flexibility exercises, done on land and in water, significantly reduced pain and also improved physical function. Repetitive activities, even with minimal force, it pumps some of the joint lubricant called synovial fluid into cartilage, which keeps it healthy. Also, when you move a joint you build up a synovial fluid layer between the two moving parts, which helps decrease the friction in the joint. However, with severe arthritis, do only gentle exercises, because anything more strenuous will make pain worse.
- No link between statins and cognition: An analysis of randomized controlled trials as well as cohort, case-control, and cross-sectional studies showed that the risk for dementia was 13% lower among statin users than among nonusers; the risk of Alzheimer disease was 21% lower for statin users; and risk for mild cognitive impairment was 34% lower for statin users.
- Mediterranean diet now linked to reduced risk of PAD: We've known for a long time that eating a Mediterranean-style diet can help lower your risk of heart attack and stroke, with especially strong evidence since 2013. Now a randomized trial, published Jan 2014 in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, finds that it can also lower your risk of peripheral artery disease (PAD). PAD is caused by plaque buildup in the walls of the arteries in your limbs, especially your legs. These clogged arteries put you at risk for leg ulcers and even gangrene. The Mediterranean diet includes wholesome foods rich in antioxidants, but very little refined sugar, processed food, or unhealthy saturated or trans fats, which damage the arteries in the body. An easy way to recognize PAD is leg pain or cramping and leg fatigue with walking and stair climbing, but go away promptly when you stop.
- Sit more, live less, warn Harvard researchers: In Jan 2014, the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* published a study of more than 90,000 postmenopausal women and found that sitting for long stretches of time increased the odds of an untimely death. Men are also vulnerable. Those who spent five or more hours a day sitting were 34% more likely to develop heart failure than were men who sat two hours or less, irrespective of how much they exercised. The more time spent sitting—anywhere—the greater the odds of dying early from all causes, including heart disease and cancer. The finding even applied to women who exercised regularly, if the rest of the day was spent sitting. This covers computer time, TV, and reading. How can you combat this? Every 30-60 minutes get up and walk around for at least a few minutes, whether you're at home or at work.

- It matters how fast you walk: 39,000 people in the National Walkers' Health Study reports that a brisk pace has more benefits—even if the distance traveled is the same. Looking at 2,000 deaths among walkers, researchers found mortality disproportionately higher among those with the slowest pace (17 minutes or more per mile, with most taking at least 20 minutes and many even longer). The higher death rate for the slowest walkers remained higher even if they walked as far per day as faster walkers. Overall, the risk was especially higher for those dawdling along at 24 minutes a mile or slower. Picking up your pace even a little seemed to pay off, however: Those classified in the third-slowest category of walkers (about 15-17 minutes per mile) saw a significant reduction in their risk of dying prematurely compared to the slowest group.
- Are you really benefiting from your multivitamins? In *Annals of Internal Medicine* two new studies show that evidence is sufficient to advise against routine supplementation. An estimated 40% of American adults who take a daily multivitamin are simply wasting their money. Over and over, we've seen that obtaining nutrients from supplements does not confer the same benefits as consuming a well-chosen diet. This is a \$30 billion industry. Dr. Fortmann, of the Kaiser Center of Health Research, who led the US Preventive Services Task Force (USPTF) told the New York Times that vitamin purchasers may be "throwing their money away".
- Frozen produce is just as nutritious as fresh—and superior in vitamin and mineral content to fresh produce stored in the refrigerator for a few days. After being stored for five days food showed losses of vitamin A, vitamin C and folate.
- Aspartame is safe: After "one of the most comprehensive risk assessments of aspartame ever undertaken," the European Food Safety Authority has concluded the artificial sweetener is safe at recommended levels of consumption. The review of both animal and human studies concluded that aspartame does not increase the risk of cancer or damage genes, the brain or nervous system. Only people with phenylketonuria need to limit aspartame consumption. These findings were echoed by the Food Standards Agency, the UK's version of the FDA.
- Stick to your ribs: Looking for a breakfast that will keep you full until lunchtime? Give oatmeal a whirl. The oatmeal has more beta-glucan—a viscous, gummy fiber—that makes you feel less hungry over the next four hours.
- Cancer-protective plant foods: Squash, carrots, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes protect against breast, prostate, colon and lung cancers. Apples protect against mouth, throat, lung, and colon cancers. Cranberries protects against colon and lung cancer and some leukemias. Dark, leafy vegetables, such as kale help detoxify the liver. Cruciferous vegetables such as cabbage, Brussels sprouts, and broccoli protect against stomach, prostate, lung, and oral cancers.
- Look at the hand to assess knee osteoarthritis risk: The closer in length a person's index finger and ring finger are, the more likely that person is to have severe knee osteoarthritis requiring total knee replacement according to a study in *Rheumatology*.