

Health Nuggets Feb 2015

1. Things to avoid in ER: Avoid CT head scans for patients with minor head injury who are at low risk or if patient has had a syncopal (fainting) episode.
Avoid having a foley urinary catheter placed in ER to monitor urine output in stable patients who can void or for staff convenience.
Avoid X-Rs of patients with non-traumatic low back pain unless there are neurological deficits.
Avoid Rx for antibiotics for uncomplicated sinusitis.
2. Maintaining muscle mass may help prolong your life: A study in the *American Journal of Medicine* suggests that the more muscle mass older Americans have, the less likely they are to die prematurely. There is growing evidence that overall body composition –and not the widely used body mass index, or BMI—is a better predictor of all-cause mortality. The study involved 3,659 patients who were men 55 or older, and women who were 65 or older. There were some limitations. For instance, one can't definitively establish a cause-and-effect relationship between muscle mass and survival using a cohort study such as NHANES III, "But we can say that muscle mass seems to be an important predictor of risk of death." Dr. Srikanthan says. Contributors to muscle mass are protein intake—for women 1.0 grams per 2.2 lbs. It's better to eat more plant proteins and fewer animal proteins. Another is Vit D which appears to be critical in preserving muscle mass and function. Also a diet with excess acidic nutrients, like meat and dairy, and too few alkaline-producing plant foods, may have negative effects. Vit B12 & folic acid are also needed. Breakfast cereals, breads, and other grains are fortified with these. Exercise is needed to build muscle mass. Warm up for 5 minutes with an easy walk or jog while swinging arms. Then work your way up to 8-12 repetitions of an exercise with weights or a resistance band. Alternate upper and lower body parts. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
3. Researchers ID more pesticides linked to Parkinson's, and gene that increases risk: Studies in *Neurology* have shown that certain pesticides can increase people's risk of developing Parkinson's disease. UCLA researchers have found that the strength of that risk depends on our individual genetic makeup. They tested a number of pesticides and found 11 that inhibit the ALDH gene family and increase the risk of Parkinson's two-to-six-fold than those without the variant.
4. Preeclampsia—autism connection found: In the online *JAMA Pediatrics* 517 boys and girls with autism were evaluated in the CHARGE study. The children were more than twice as likely to have been exposed *in utero* to preeclampsia. The autism was more likely if the mother had had a more severe case of preeclampsia, and even with that, the vast majority of women with severe preeclampsia don't have children who develop autism. This is when the mother developed hypertension during the latter half of pregnancy and may have increased levels of protein in the urine and edema.
5. Use Digoxin cautiously for atrial fibrillation: If you have atrial fibrillation, but no heart failure, digoxin confers a 71% higher risk of death and 63% higher risk of hospitalization. In *Circulation: Arrhythmia and Electrophysiology* Kaiser Permanente published a study of 15,000 adults and stated that, "Given the other

- options available for heart-rate control, digoxin should be used with caution in atrial fibrillation, especially in the absence of symptomatic systolic heart failure.”
6. Flaxseed: A nonmedical treatment for high blood pressure: If you have hypertension, adding ground flaxseed to your diet may help lower your blood pressure. In a study published in *Hypertension* the participants' blood pressure dropped 15 mm Hg. Thus it would be expected to lower the risk of heart attack by 30% and stroke by 50%. It should be stored in the refrigerator.
 7. A little weight loss pays off: A study in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* shows that you don't have to achieve your ideal body weight to improve your cardiovascular profile. In fact, losing only 10% of your body weight and keeping it off had a 4-point reduction in blood sugar levels, a 5.4 mg/dL reduction in cholesterol and an 18 mg/dL reduction in triglycerides. In many cases, this was enough to change their risk from high to medium or low.
 8. Overnight denture wear tied to pneumonia: In *Journal of Dental Research* a study of 524 men and women found a 2.3 fold higher risk of pneumonia. They were also more likely to have tongue and denture plaque, gum inflammation, positive culture for yeast and higher levels of circulating interleukin-6.
 9. Good news from Adventist Health Study-2: Vegans and lacto-ovo vegetarians (milk & eggs) were not at higher risk of vitamin B 12 deficiency than non-vegetarians. Many do take vitamin B 12 supplements.
 10. 5 strategies for a better memory: 1) Participants did not remember things they heard nearly as well as things they saw or touched. Listening is a passive activity. Using vision and the sense of touch engages you in a more active way, making your experience more memorable.
2) Quizzing yourself after each paragraph or page is more effective than re-reading an article several times. 3) Space out learning. Instead of spending an entire hour trying to learn new information, try breaking it into a series of three 20-minute segments. After each segment, spend 10 minutes distracting yourself, such as taking a walk or listening to music. Repeat this spaced learning the next day, and perhaps again a day later. This is a better way to transfer information into long-term memory. 4) Memory is better when sleep occurs shortly after learning new information. Rehearsing information before bed takes advantage of the fact that memory consolidation occurs during sleep. 5) Clench your fists. Researchers found that participants who clenched their right (or left) fist before memorizing a word list for 90 seconds, then clenched their left (or right) fist immediately prior to trying to recall the words performed significantly better than those who clenched their fists in a different manner or did not clench their fists at all. The study suggests that certain motor functions may improve memory by activating connected brain regions that are associated with memory formation.
 11. Learning a second language may help delay dementia: 648 dementia patients were studied, and those who were bilingual developed dementia 4.5 years later than those who spoke only one language. Bilingualism combines sound, visual memory, processing function, and social cognition. It's like working on 10 processes for the price of one.
 11. Foods cooked in a microwave oven may keep more of their vitamins and minerals, because microwaves can cook food more quickly and without adding

- water. Microwave energy is changed to heat as it is absorbed by food, and does not make food “radioactive or contaminated”.
12. Should everyone try to eat gluten-free products? No. Just those with celiac disease. It can be diagnosed with a simple blood test. There is no good evidence that a gluten-free diet will benefit most people in any way.
 13. Apples: They increase endurance, because they contain an antioxidant called quercetin, which allows oxygen to reach the lungs more easily. Eat an apple before working out and see how it affects you endurance. Apples whiten teeth because they contain malic acid. They boost your immune system and satisfy cravings for sweets. They also help fight cancer because they contain triterpenoids, which may fight against cancers like liver, breast, and colon. Lastly apples are believed to increase the production of acetylcholine—a neurotransmitter—so they may improve memory and lower your risk of Alzheimer’s.
 14. Coconut palm sugar: No sugars, even ones that sound more natural, are “health foods”. They provide empty calories. Coconut palm sugar is expensive—about \$4 to \$12 a pound.
 15. Is there any benefit to taking multivitamins? As many as 40% of Americans take a daily vitamin. Two recent studies, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* confirm that routine supplementation with multivitamins has no benefit against cognitive decline, heart attack or cancer risk. Getting nutrients from a well-rounded diet is far more beneficial than nutrients from supplements. That being said, however, there were several caveats. Many people need to supplement vitamin D and calcium as we get older. Also B12 for vegans is helpful. And, of course, folic acid is needed during pregnancy. A multivitamin may also lower the risk of cancer in men, but no study has been done for women. The Physicians’ Health Study II found an 8-12% lower risk of cancers, but it only included male physicians. When they looked at results by age group, men 70 and older experienced an 18% reduction in cancer. So men that have a less healthful diet may benefit. A trial has begun with Centrum Silver going up against placebo in a trial of 18,000 older men and women for the next 4 years.