

# short takes

USABLE NEWS + TIPS BONNIE SCHIEDEL



## Broken hearts

Male and female hearts are not created equal. Researchers at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver looked at 32,856 Canadians with chest pain who underwent cardiac catheterization to check for reduced blood flow to the heart. The gender differences were striking: 23% of women, compared with 7% of men, had normal-looking arteries, even though the women were more likely to be older and have high blood pressure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, peripheral vascular disease and a history of stroke. Women were also four times more likely to be readmitted to the hospital for recurring chest pain in the six months after catheterization. "Cardiac catheterization may not be the best way to diagnose coronary disease in women," says study co-author Dr. Karin Humphries, an associate professor in the UBC medical school's department of cardiology. "Physicians should consider additional diagnostic tests — such as stress echocardiography or nuclear perfusion — in women with chest pain, as well as treatment with beta blockers and ASA."

## MOVE OF THE MONTH Check Your Posture

"When I coach people into a healthy, neutral alignment and show them how it looks in photos, they immediately say they look as if they've lost weight and appear more fit," says Rob Williams, a kinesiologist and co-owner of Performance Posture in Vancouver. Correct posture also helps to treat and prevent injury and pain. Here's how to do a quick posture self-check.

Stand with your back, shoulder blades and buttocks against a wall and your heels two to five inches (5 to 12 cm) away from the wall.

In this position, you should be able to easily rest the base of your skull against the wall and keep your eyes and head level. The space between your lower back and the wall should be about the thickness of your hand — one to two inches (2.5 to 5 cm). Can't do it comfortably? Talk to someone with kinesiology or physiotherapy expertise about a tune-up.



## YOUR MEDICAL IQ

### Epigenetics is...

- 1 the study of the genetics of epilepsy
- 2 a new international centre for genetic research
- 3 the epidemiology of genetics and epidemics
- 4 the study of the ways environmental factors such as diet and chemical exposure can prompt changes in gene expression

The Greek preposition *epi* (upon) refers to changes in how genes are expressed on top of, or in addition to, the traditional mode of expression through different DNA sequences. And these environment-related changes may be passed on to descendants. A Swedish study, for example, found that men whose diets had been restricted in childhood (due to crop failures) had children and grandchildren who were unlikely to die of cardiovascular disease. Having plenty of food during childhood, on the other hand, meant that men had descendants who were more likely to die of diabetes. Epigenetic influences on genes may play a role in cancer, diabetes, Crohn's disease and schizophrenia.

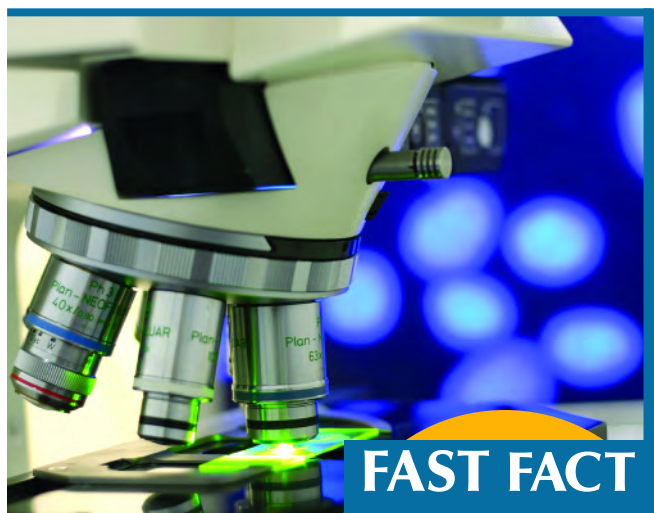
Answer: 4

## Myth or Reality?

*Your eyes are safe from ultraviolet rays under water.*

**Myth** Just as your back can get burned when you spend time under water — snorkelling, for example — your eyes are also vulnerable to UV rays beneath the waves, says Rachel Hill-Campbell, a registered optician based in Thorold, Ont. So serious swimmers might want to invest in UV-protected goggles, which are available in both prescription and non-prescription models. Also on the market are UV-protected prescription masks, which allow eyeglass-dependent swimmers to see without their specs. Prices for this underwater eyewear range from \$80 to \$100. Talk to your optician.

— Diana Swift



### FAST FACT

70%

The proportion of patients who need stem-cell transplants (often for blood diseases such as leukemia and aplastic anemia) and don't have a match within their own families. Want to help? If you're healthy and between the ages of 17 and 50, contact Canadian Blood Services at [www.onematch.ca](http://www.onematch.ca) or 1 888 2 DONATE to find out how to place your name in the database of potential donors.

## Eat this!

A crisp wedge of watermelon is the perfect way to quench your thirst on a hot summer day — and get some valuable nutrients, too. “Watermelon is a good source of lycopene, an antioxidant pigment that shows promise in fighting cancer, especially prostate cancer, and is also associated with a reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes and macular degeneration,” says Karolina Sekulic, an Edmonton-based registered dietitian. “Two cups of diced watermelon are also packed with vitamins A and C and potassium — all for about 90 calories.”

**TIP** Keep that uncut watermelon out of the fridge. A study in the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* found that ripe watermelons stored at 21°C (70°F) contained as much as 40% more lycopene than those stored at 13°C (55°F).



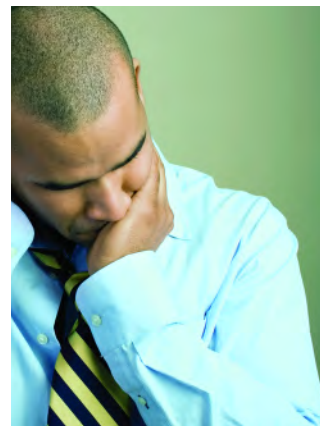


## A Good EGG

New research from Laval University in Quebec City may help more couples conceive through in vitro fertilization (IVF). Scientists took samples of the follicular cells that surround eggs harvested from the ovaries for IVF. "We compared the follicular cells from the women who did become pregnant with those who did not and identified eight genetic markers that were expressed more abundantly in the successful pregnancies," says lead researcher Dr. Marc-André Sirard, co-director of Laval's Centre of Research in Biology of Reproduction. "Currently, promising eggs are identified through visual inspection. Our analysis is another way to identify the eggs that have the best chance of success." This technique may help fertility technicians choose only one high-quality embryo to transfer to a woman's uterus, thereby decreasing the incidence of multiple births and the health risks, such as premature birth, that go along with them.

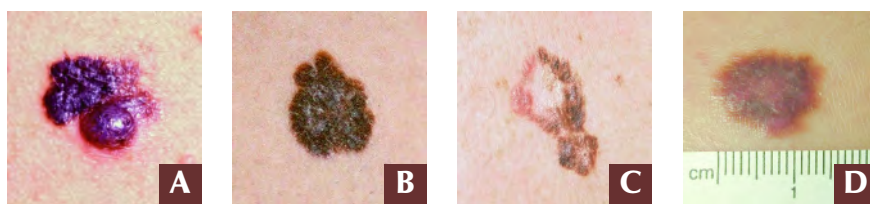
## Testosterone and mood

The link between hormonal changes and depression is well established in women. But what about men? A new three-year-long Australian study of nearly 4,000 men ages 71 to 89 found that the men who met the diagnostic criteria for depression had significantly lower levels of testosterone than those who were not depressed. The researchers speculate that levels of brain hormones or neurotransmitters in these men may be affected and suggest that testosterone supplementation may be a therapeutic option.



## MOLE POLL

From the pictures below, choose the one that shows a normal mole.



**ANSWER**  
Trick question — they all illustrate abnormal moles.

### THE ABCs OF ABNORMAL MOLES

- A** is for asymmetry. One side of the mole is different from the other.
- B** is for border. The edges of the mole are irregular and not sharply defined.
- C** is for colour. The colour of the mole varies and may include brown, red, black, grey or white.
- D** is for diameter. The mole is larger than ½ inch (12.7 mm).
- E** is for evolution. There's a change in the mole's colour, size or shape, or in symptoms such as tenderness, itching or bleeding.

If you have an unusual mole, don't panic. "Some people have dozens of weird moles, yet we don't remove them just because they're there," says Dr. Cheryl Rosen, a Toronto dermatologist and national director of the Canadian Dermatology Association's National Sun Awareness Program. "However, ask your doctor to examine it, especially if the mole appears to be changing. An abnormal mole can go on to become a melanoma, a potentially lethal skin cancer. Fortunately, most don't. "An unusual mole is, however, a hint to be even more careful about sun exposure." (A melanoma can also develop in previously normal skin, where there was no mole.)

So, this summer, wear protective clothing in the sun and use a broad-spectrum sunscreen that guards against both UVA and UVB rays.

# You ask, we answer

## SKEETER SCARE

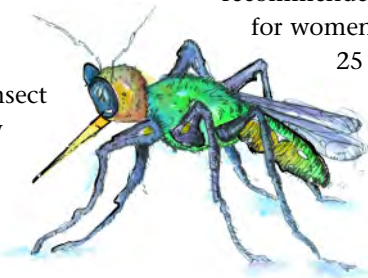
What is West Nile virus, and how do I protect myself?

West Nile virus is an infectious disease originating in Africa and transmitted by certain types of mosquitoes in Canada. It may cause no symptoms at all or induce a fever and flu-like symptoms, sometimes with a rash or swollen lymph glands. Its long-term effects are not known. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there were 2,353 reported cases in 2007.

For most people, the disease is self-limiting and they recover on their own. "The risk is when the disease invades the central nervous system and results in meningitis or encephalitis," says Dr. Robbin Lindsay, a research scientist at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. That can lead to hospitalization — even death. Those with chronic diseases and weakened immune systems are at the greatest risk for complications.

So what's the best way to protect yourself? "Avoid mosquitoes," says Lindsay. "Mosquitoes bite — that's how they earn their living. They're going to find the unprotected areas on you and bite."

For outdoor activities from dusk to dawn, skeeters' prime biting time, wear loose light-coloured clothing, a hat, long sleeves, long pants and closed shoes with socks. Use mosquito netting on strollers. Apply DEET-based insect repellents but follow product safety instructions, especially for children. Do not



use on infants under six months of age or on broken skin.

Make sure all windows are tightly screened. And empty standing water from places where it collects: wheelbarrows, buckets, flowerpots and eavestroughs. For more details, go to [www.westnilevirus.gc.ca](http://www.westnilevirus.gc.ca).

## TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING?

I'm trying to up my fibre intake, but what happens if I consume too much?

Although getting too much fibre is not a widespread problem in Canada, excess intake can interfere with the proper absorption of vitamins, minerals, protein and calories in the digestive tract. It can also affect the absorption of some medications.

"The common problem with fibre isn't usually taking more than the recommended amount but suddenly taking more fibre than your body is used to," says Edmonton-based registered dietitian Maricel Reddy. "Fibre ferments in the intestines causing bloating, gas and discomfort. Problems are more likely to occur if you don't drink enough fluids as you increase your fibre intake." Remember to increase your intake gradually.

Consuming large amounts of non-dietary sources of fibre, such as supplements for bowel regularity, can result in excessive intake. The recommended daily amount of fibre for women ages 19 to 50 is

25 grams; for men it's

38 grams. After age

50, women need

21 grams and men

30. Most Canadians

consume less than

11 grams a day.



## CRAMPING HER STYLE

My 10-year-old daughter's leg cramps interfere with her summer activities.

What causes these cramps?

"Intense physical activity — particularly in high heat — can cause cramping," says Dr. Jeremy Friedman, division head of pediatric medicine at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and author of *Caring for Kids* (2006). Opinion differs on the causes of these painful contractions. Possible culprits include dehydration and mineral loss due to sweating. Make sure your active daughter drinks plenty of fluids. Raising and straightening the affected leg and flexing the toes and foot upward will often ease the pain. "A muscle massage, a heating pad, a warm bath and some light stretching exercises may help, too," Friedman says. A children's painkiller is another option.

— Laura Jones 

Got a medical question? Email us at [editor@canadian-health.ca](mailto:editor@canadian-health.ca) or write to Editor, *Canadian Health*, 6 Withrow Avenue, Toronto ON M4K 1C9.