

short takes

USABLE NEWS + TIPS BONNIE SCHIEDEL

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

A nutraceutical is...



A a new medication designed for people with nut allergies

B a clinical nutrition consultant



C a health compound extracted from food and refined and packaged in a purified form

D the scientific term for artificial sweeteners



ANSWER C The term was coined in 1989 by Dr. Stephen DeFelixe, a New Jersey physician. To be considered a nutraceutical, the substance should have proven health benefits, such as reducing cholesterol, although the term is not regulated. Examples include psyllium laxatives, fish oil capsules and garlic pills. Do people need nutraceuticals? The jury's still out. "You can get all the nutrition you need from eating a wide range of healthy foods," says Jennifer Grant Moore, a registered dietitian in Halifax. "For example, if you want the benefits of flax, take flaxseed oil in your salad dressing, not in a capsule." If you want to take a nutraceutical, check first with a dietitian, doctor or pharmacist because it may interfere with other medications you're taking.



A web of support

If you or a loved one is going through a lengthy treatment or recovery period, consider using www.carepages.com. This free password-protected site allows you to post accurate updates for friends and family, who, in turn, can send messages of support.



EAT THIS!

Thank goodness for winter squash — a perfect comfort food at a time of year when fresh local produce can be hard to come by. Acorn and butternut are two of the most popular varieties.

"They're an excellent source of vitamin A, which is good for the immune system and the lining of the nose and throat — important during cough and cold season," says Susin Cadman, a registered dietitian in Brandon, Man. "And a half-cup serving contains just 45 to 60 calories." **TIP** Look for squash with the stem still attached. This helps to keep it fresh longer.

MOVE OF THE MONTH

Avoiding winter wipeouts



Slipping on an icy patch of ground is embarrassing at best, painful and debilitating at worst. In 2002/03 data on Canadians who needed to be hospitalized after a fall, the average hospital stay was 3.6 days for those ages 40 to 59 and 7.6 days for those ages 60 to 79, according to the Safety Council of Canada. Here's how to avoid a fall.

- Wear boots with a thick, non-slip sole and wide, low heels.
- Wear ice-grippers that fit over your footwear but be sure to remove them before walking on indoor surfaces. Available at hardware stores and pharmacies.
- Carry a small bag of sand in your pocket to sprinkle on an unexpected slippery patch.
- If you do end up on ice, controlled body movements can help prevent a fall. Slow down, keep your muscles loose and spread your feet about 12 inches (30 cm) apart. Bend your knees a bit to help stabilize your body. Take a small step, placing your whole foot on the ice at once, and slowly shift your weight to that foot. Move your other foot, continuing to keep your feet about 12 inches apart.



Myth or reality?

Running can make you high

Reality. So don't shelve your jogging shoes for the season yet. German researchers have validated the proverbial runner's high, showing that jogging produces endorphins — the brain's naturally occurring opiates. Studying 10 long-distance runners, they reported in the journal *Cerebral Cortex* that these mood-boosting chemicals bind to areas of the brain that are associated with good emotions — the same regions activated by falling in love or listening to thrilling music. They used 3-D imaging PET scans and a chemical that competes for brain space with endorphins to establish their presence and quantity. They also gave standard psychological tests to the runners to measure their moods before and after two-hour runs. Happiness levels were significantly higher after the runs, and the greater the euphoria, the more endorphins in the runners' brains. — *Diana Swift*

BABY BLUES FOR DADS

Postnatal depression affects 10% to 15% of new moms. But did you know that new dads may struggle, too? While there are few statistics on the number of men who experience postnatal depression, the incidence is higher in fathers who are adolescents or who belong to minorities.

It is also higher in those who have a history of depression or substance abuse, or whose female partner is experiencing postnatal depression, says Dr. John Oliffe, an associate professor of nursing at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, who studies men's mental health. "There are a number of contributing factors: marital discord, the difference between the expectation of what fatherhood would be like and the reality, feeling the responsibility of being the breadwinner, and social isolation," he says. Depression

can look different in men; symptoms include cynicism, irritability, indecisiveness, aggression and withdrawal from social functions. "Blokes are very good at camouflaging depression and can find it tough to ask for help," says Oliffe. Talk to your partner or your health-care provider about ways to get assistance, or visit the Canadian Mental Health Association at www.cmha.ca to find help in your area.



ITEMS OF INTEREST X-TREMITY HEALTH

Most normally active Canadians take between 4,000 and 6,000 steps every day. Although that falls short of the 10,000 recommended by fitness experts, it's still quite a bit. But you can't be active if your feet hurt. The Seal of Acceptance program of the Canadian Podiatric Medical Association (CPMA), based in Sherwood Park, Alta., evaluates footwear and other foot products such as sports equipment and hosiery.

Almost one-quarter of the bones in the body are in the feet. As well, each foot contains 33 joints and more than 100 ligaments, muscles and tendons. "Every day, we put considerable stress on our feet, so it's not surprising that they sometimes hurt or develop aches and ailments," says Jayne Jeneroux, the CPMA's executive director. "You have only one pair of feet to last a lifetime, so it's important to take good care of them." The CPMA seal guarantees that a product has been reviewed and tested by a committee consisting of doctors of podiatric medicine. Check out these CPMA-approved foot products.



TINY TOOTSIES

Minibel footwear for babies and kids is made in France and comes in pre-walkers, sandals, oxfords, dress shoes and boots. "Children's shoes that are approved for the CPMA seal are well made from breathable materials and provide good support," says Jeneroux. The Miniflex models have removable insoles that can be adjusted. About \$30 to \$70. To find a Minibel store near you, go to www.minibelshoes.com.

When fitting your child for shoes, have her wear socks of the same type she normally does. Shoes should be fitted with the child standing. If shoes are uncomfortable and need to be broken in, they're the wrong ones. It's the child's feet, not the shoes, that will be broken in! Shoes that are too big may lead to clumsiness, falls and foot pain. Undersized shoes may permanently deform the feet. Toes need to move, so buy shoes with about half an inch of wiggle room at the toe ends. The counters, the material on either side of the heels, should be stiff enough to provide support and snug but not tight.

NAIL IT!

Fungi-Rid Fungus Nail Treatment by Foot Repair System is an easy-to-apply lacquer that is antifungal, antibacterial and antimicrobial. Made in Quebec, it is applied once a day to the toenails and is non-irritating to surrounding skin. About \$35 for one ounce (30 mL). Available from podiatrists; to locate one near you, go to www.podiatrycanada.org.

Nail fungus (onychomycosis) is more common on toes than fingers since, like athlete's foot, it thrives in a dark damp environment. It is uncommon in children, but affects up to 20% of the population ages 40 and up. Males are at greater risk, as are those with poor hygiene, bad circulation and sweaty feet. A tiny injury may provide a point of entry for the fungus, which is easily contracted via unsanitary conditions in pedicure salons, by sharing clippers, emery boards or towels and walking barefoot in change rooms. Signs are debris around the edges of a nail, discoloration, bumps, ridges and cracking. Starting on the nail's surface,

the fungus breeds under the nail and spreads from one nail to the next.



Birth control 911

The emergency contraception drug, levonorgestrel (sold in Canada under the brand name Plan B), is now available over the counter, meaning that women don't need to get a doctor's prescription for it or ask a pharmacist for it. Taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse or contraceptive failure, the medication reduces the risk of pregnancy by delaying ovulation or preventing fertilization or implantation of the egg.


YOUR MEDICAL IQ

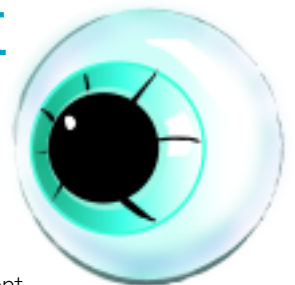
The proportion of Canadian children born by Caesarean section is...

A 26.3% B 10.4% C 17.6% D 32.9%

Answer A According to a new study from the Canadian Institute for Health Research in Ottawa, from 1993 to 2006, the C-section rate increased from 17.6% to 26.3%. C-sections are increasing for a number of reasons, including more older obese mothers and a shortage of maternity health-care providers. Changing patient preferences and doctor attitudes are factors, too. "We need to be sure that C-sections are not driven by convenience, that interventions are medically indicated and that the safety of a woman and her baby are the driving factors," notes Dr. Guylaine Lefebvre, president of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada in Ottawa.

SAY EYE

Montreal researchers are making strides in treating amblyopia, or lazy eye, in adults. Occurring when the vision in one eye doesn't develop properly in childhood, amblyopia affects 3% to 5% of Canadians. The condition was thought to be permanent once an affected person entered adulthood, but in the Montreal study, painless, non-invasive magnetic stimulation triggered weak electric currents in the brains of adult volunteers, which temporarily improved their vision. "The treatment may reduce, for a short time, the suppression that fibres in the good eye exert on fibres in the bad eye," says Dr. Robert Hess, director of the McGill Vision Research Unit. "There is hope for adults with amblyopia." 



THE SOLE'S INNER SOUL

Inova Solex Orthotic Insoles, made in Chelsea, Que., from synthetic materials with the addition of silver, can be moulded to fit your feet. They reduce the impact of heat and moisture, and inhibit odour and bacteria. Orthotic devices hold the feet in alignment, thereby helping to relieve pain in the lower legs, heels and arches.



Establishing proper alignment of the feet can also relieve knee and hip pain. Not all insoles are orthotic, however; often package labels will make false claims about the effectiveness of insoles.

Solex has a line for everyday use and two lines especially formulated for people with diabetes. About \$19 to \$30. To find a retail outlet in your area, go to www.inova.ca.

SOCK IT TO 'EM!

Simcan Socks, manufactured in Cambridge, Ont., are often recommended for people with diabetes, arthritis or edema, but anyone seeking extra comfort will enjoy wearing them, too.

They come in casual styles for everyday use, dressy styles and a line for hikers and construction workers. And they share advantages with socks made for people with diabetes — in particular, seamless toes that don't chafe or cause injury and non-binding tops that don't interfere with circulation. About \$9 to \$11 a pair. For a retailer near you, go to www.simcan.net.



For more information on foot care, call 1 888 220 3338 or go to www.podiatrycanada.org.

— Laura Jones

ILLUSTRATION: CONNIE MORRIS