

# short takes

USABLE NEWS + TIPS + ITEMS OF INTEREST DIANA SWIFT

## A Future Without Breast Cancer

Each year in early October, thousands of Canadians participate in the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure to mark the beginning of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Visit [www.cbcf.org](http://www.cbcf.org) to check out the many ways you can help create a future without breast cancer — including signing up early for the 2010 Run, volunteering and donating.

**CIBC Run  for the Cure**  
CANADIAN BREAST CANCER FOUNDATION

## Osteoporosis Disconnect

A 2008/2009 survey by Harris Decima research found gaps between the perceptions of women over age 55 with osteoporosis and the physicians treating their disease.

- Fewer than one out of 10 women polled described herself as frail and fragile.
  - Six out of 10 doctors described women with this bone disease as frail and fragile.
- More than four in five women reported that osteoporosis had not impaired their participation in day-to-day activities such as shopping and socializing. Almost seven in 10 described themselves as still being fairly or very active.
  - More than half of the doctors surveyed said that osteoporosis prevents women from participating in everyday activities.
- Fewer than half of the women reported missing a treatment dose.
  - Almost all the doctors believed that their patients had missed a treatment dose.

**Recommendation** Women with osteoporosis and their doctors need to get on the same page and have more discussions about bone health and the best treatments available.



## Autumnal asthma



An unwanted feature of the fall school term is a spike in child asthma flare-ups and asthma-related doctor and hospital visits. “The peak occurs about three weeks after Labour Day,” says allergist Dr. Susan Wasserman, a professor of medicine at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont. The primary cause of this seasonal rise in asthma symptoms is greater exposure to the rhinovirus (the culprit behind the common cold) in the close quarters of the classroom. In fact, colds are the most frequent asthma trigger in young children, and are associated with up to 85% of asthma exacerbations. “Another factor, Wasserman adds, “is that in the summertime many parents put their kids on a drug holiday to give them a break from their anti-inflammatory medication.” When the underlying inflammation in the airway increases, kids also become more vulnerable to seasonal triggers such as moulds and ragweed pollen, which peaks around Labour Day but circulates until the first killer frost. The proximity to schoolmates and sometimes to animals kept in or brought into the classroom for show and tell can expose kids to irritating pet dander. A study by McMaster researchers found a reduction in fall asthma flare-ups when children were started on the leukotriene antagonist montelukast (Singulair) in mid-August.

## WHAT'S IN A WORD?

### Pica is...

- 1 A unit of measure in typesetting
- 2 An eating disorder
- 3 A town in Northumbria, England
- 4 A type of magpie



**Answer** All of the above. In health and medicine, pica is an eating disorder involving a compulsive appetite for ingesting earth and other non-nutritive substances. Some sufferers have been known to consume glass, paper, paint, glue, hair, dirt and laundry detergent. Pica may result from a mineral deficiency, and occurs most frequently in pregnant women and in young children who are developmentally disabled or living in lower-income areas.

## MOVE OF THE MONTH

### Atlas shrugged

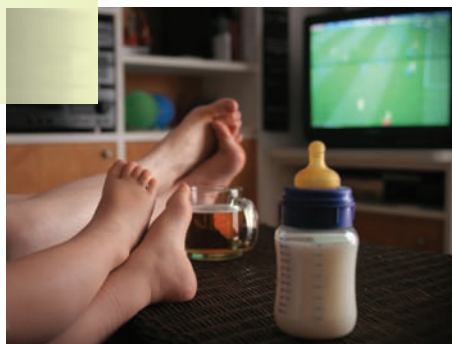
Like those of Atlas, the globe-toting Titan of Greek mythology, your shoulders carry a weighty load. Strengthening your shoulder muscles and keeping them flexible will make it easier to haul heavy objects and will help prevent damage to the tendons in your arms. Try this simple strengthening exercise from the physiotherapy department of St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.



- 1 Stand with your feet planted slightly apart, your arms at your sides and your back straight.
- 2 With your shoulders back, but not exaggeratedly so, raise them up slowly in a big shrug as if to make them touch your ears, then lower them slowly.
- 3 Do a set of at least 20 every day. Try alternating a set of 10 shrugs with a set of 10 shoulder rolls. Lift up your shoulders to the ears, then rotate them backwards in a circle. Then try rolling them forwards.

### Hit the bottle, hit the screen

If your two-year-old is still using a baby bottle, she's probably also watching too much TV. Recent years have seen growing concern over the subsequent negative health effects — from ADHD to obesity — of high levels of screen-viewing time in very young children. Now researchers at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto have found that toddlers who still use a baby bottle at age two are more likely to spend more time in front of television and computer screens than two-year-olds who've kicked the habit. Led by pediatrician Dr. Jonathan McGuire, the investigators studied 96 healthy pediatric patients, ages 24 to 30 months. They found that bottle users clocked almost double the screen time per day than non-users (60 minutes versus 34 minutes) and were almost three times as likely to eat their meals with the TV on. "Sometimes parents use bottles to pacify their children, and they also use television for this," says McGuire. "These are two unhealthy behaviours that intersect and can lead to lasting health problems later." According to current recommendations, he says, children should not use the bottle beyond 15 months, and those under age two should not watch any television.



## Seniors and calories



As a general rule, your metabolism slows down as you age, so older people need fewer calories. But older people only need to cut back on calories by about 10%. For a sedentary woman of 70 years, the recommended energy intake level from the U.S. Institute of Medicine at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C., is 1,600 calories — only 200 calories less than the 1,800-calorie recommendation for a 31-year-old sedentary woman. “However, while our need for calories generally decreases with age, our need for nutrients either increases or stays the same,” says Kim Arrey, a Montreal-based registered dietitian. *Canada’s Food Guide* recommends that all people over age 50 take 400 international units of vitamin D in a daily supplement. Most seniors would also benefit from a multivitamin/mineral supplement. “Seniors should review their diets with a dietitian to make sure that there is no negative interaction between supplements and any medical conditions or medications,” says Arrey. Seniors with a busy lifestyle or who tend to skip breakfast or other meals are better off taking liquid meal replacements than going for high-calorie, low-nutrient snacks and fast food, she adds.



### Don't be D-ficient!

As the clocks fall back this November, your body’s vitamin production will fall off. During the dark months of autumn and winter when Canadians’ exposure to sunshine is low, adults should consider taking a daily supplement of 1,000 international units of this crucial vitamin, according to the Canadian Cancer Society. “Our vitamin D recommendation is based on the growing body of evidence about the potential link between vitamin D and reducing risk for colorectal, breast and prostate cancers,” says Heather Chappell, the society’s senior manager for cancer control policy.

Individuals at high risk for D deficiency might benefit from a daily supplement year-round. These include people age 50 and older, those with dark skin (which does not absorb the sun’s D-triggering UVB rays as well), those who rarely go outdoors and those who wear clothing that covers most of their skin.

### Eat these!



Parsnips. They may look like grandpa carrots that haven’t seen enough sun, but they’re even more nourishing than their orange cousins. These sweet, funky-tasting taproots are low in calories and rich in blood-pressure-friendly potassium and dietary fibre. Parsnips are also a valuable source of folate, and they supply magnesium, vitamin C and pantothenic acid. Take a page from the culinary past and serve them mashed or roasted as an alternative to potatoes. And while you’re at it, pass the parsnip wine!



## Fighting Back at Plaque

Dental plaque harbours the bacteria that are a major cause of gum disease. Studies show that battery-powered toothbrushes can provide an edge in the war on these harmful deposits. One new offering in power brushes is the **Pro Clean SONIC SpinBrush** from Crest. Moving at 16,000 micro-sweeps per minute, its multi-angle bristles have been found to remove up to 95% of plaque in hard-to-reach spots between the teeth. And its stimulators gently massage the gums for better gingival health. **\$17.99 to \$19.99.** [www.spinbrush.ca](http://www.spinbrush.ca)



## Ear Candy for Exercisers

This fall, do laps of the pool to the beat of your favourite tunes with a waterproof MP3 player. One option is Aquajogger's **Mi-Sport Headphones**. Their secure fit prevents slipping whether you're doing flips off the board or somersaults on the trampoline. These underwater headphones play more than 250 MP3s and hold more than 14 hours of content. Multi-format-compatible, they change tracks with a click of a button. **US\$135 (about C\$150).** 1 800 922 9544; [www.aquajogger.com](http://www.aquajogger.com)



## If and when...

A new home pregnancy test kit tells prospective moms not just whether they are pregnant (99% accuracy) but how long they've been pregnant (92% accuracy). **Clearblue Digital Pregnancy Test with Conception Indicator** from Swiss Precision Diagnostics estimates how many weeks have passed since conception (one to two, two to three, or three or more) using a second hormone sensor to measure the level of the pregnancy hormone human chorionic gonadotropin. A survey commissioned by the manufacturers found that 68% of women feel it's important to know how many weeks pregnant they are, which can be difficult for women with irregular cycles. This helps them take measures to protect the baby's health and determine the best time to announce their pregnancies. **\$17.99.** [www.clearblue.com](http://www.clearblue.com)

