

Usable news & tips & items of interest

Diana Swift

Don't Rush the Mush!

Delaying the introduction of spoon-fed complementary baby foods may be more important than the duration of breastfeeding in protecting children from being overweight in middle age. Reporting in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Copenhagen researchers followed subjects in a large perinatal database. They found that the risk of being overweight at age 42 decreased the later the age (in months) that an infant began being spoon-fed — whether with vegetables, meats other solid foods such as cereals, moistened bread or biscuits. Breastfeeding has been linked to a reduced risk of obesity in children.



Coming Down the Pike

An early arthritis test Elevated levels of inflammatory proteins called cytokines and related substances may be an early warning sign of rheumatoid arthritis (RA), according to a Swedish study published in the journal *Arthritis & Rheumatism*.

Researchers at University Hospital in Umeå found that blood levels of such chemicals rise markedly years before the onset of RA symptoms — a discovery that may set the stage for early diagnosis and treatment to prevent joint damage.

Drawing on a large blood bank, the investigators analyzed samples from 86 individuals before the appearance of RA symptoms (pre-patients), from 69 of these pre-patients after they developed RA and from 256 control subjects with no RA. Individuals who later developed this auto-immune condition had significantly higher levels of inflammatory substances produced by the immune system.

"Our findings present an opportunity for better predicting the risk of developing RA and possibly preventing disease progression," wrote lead author Dr. Solbritt Rantapää-Dahlqvist, a rheumatologist at University Hospital.



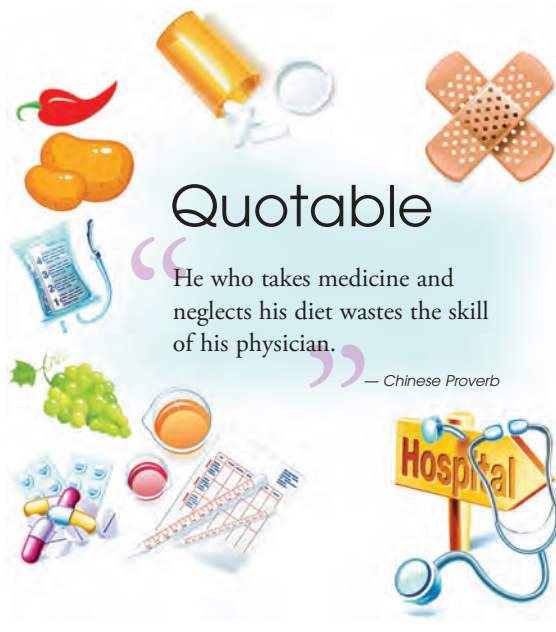
True or False?

A heart-healthy waist measurement for a woman is no more than 31.5 inches (80 cm).



Answer True

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Quotable

“He who takes medicine and neglects his diet wastes the skill of his physician.”

— Chinese Proverb

Your Medical IQ

Hemochromatosis is...

- 1 A damaging accumulation of iron in bodily organs
- 2 A hematological condition in which the blood has an abnormal silvery shine
- 3 A form of colour blindness due to an overgrowth of blood vessels in the eyes
- 4 A tissue abnormality caused by excessive blood transfusions



Answer 1 This is a primary type of iron overload that results from genetic factors or from a metabolic disorder. A reversible form of iron overload, called hemochromatosis, can result from too many blood transfusions, as in # 4.

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Just Approved OTC Oral Yeast Control

The heat, humidity and clinging wet bathing suits of summer provide ideal conditions for vaginal yeast infections (VYIs). But now women in most Canadian provinces have a non-prescription pill for fighting the discomfort of candidiasis. CanesOral[®] provides a 150-milligram oral dose of the antifungal drug fluconazole, and is now approved for over-the-counter sale in most Canadian pharmacies (behind the counter in Quebec).

“Up till now, all VYI treatments had to be inserted vaginally,” says Geneviève Duperron, a pharmacist based in Blainville, Que. “This new option offers women a full course of therapy in a single oral dose, helping them to get symptom relief quickly and conveniently at any time and in any place.”

RISK FACTORS

According to Duperron, the risk factors for this fungal infection include...

- tight underwear in non-breathing fabrics such as nylon and lycra, which trap moisture and heat, especially in summer
- wet bathing suits or other damp clothing worn too long.
- antibiotics, which kill the normal protective bacteria in the vagina and leave yeast free to proliferate
- pregnancy
- high blood sugar levels

Stat

Approximately 75% of women will experience at least one VYI during their lifetimes.



Finish Up Your Plate!

Mom's proverbial order can now be taken literally with a line of edible tableware by Dr. Diane Bisson, a professor at the University of Montreal's School of Industrial Design. Inspired by seeing discarded plastic plates at her son's school, Bisson enlisted the aid of a dietitian and a chef to develop about 40 recipes for the comestible crockery — all published in her book *Edible: Food as Material*.

"The idea of using food to support a meal isn't new," says Bisson. "The hollowed-out loaf of bread or the curved leaf are examples." Eschewing preservatives, artificial colours and sugar, Bisson created prototypes using flours from beans, water chestnuts, black quinoa, poppy seeds and carob powder, as well as fruit pastes from mangos, cherries and raspberries. She came up with crunchy, chewy or gelatinous textures, depending on which foods items were meant to hold. A Japanese seaweed jelly proved strong enough to hold boiling soup. Other materials were rigid enough to cut food on. With two more years of research to go, Bisson hopes to design edible vessels for the consumer market.



Move of the Month The Mall Walk

The thermometer is soaring, the humidex is stratospheric and the pollen and pollution counts are right off the probability meter. But that's no excuse to skip exercise. Now's the time for "mallerchise." Those sprawling suburban shopping centres may be eyesores to aesthetes but they provide kilometres of air-conditioned and car-free walking space — out of reach of the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays. Mall walking is a particularly good option for seniors, who are more susceptible to heat-related illness.



Make a brisk circuit of each storey. Take the stairs between floors or walk up the escalators. When your routine is finished, treat yourself to a bit of shopping but skip the fast-food outlets.

A Greener Cooker

Committed to conserving electricity? Hate turning on the oven on hot evenings? Want hot food at a picnic without lighting a polluting barbecue? Head to an Oriental housewares store and buy a portable thermal cooker. Though not cheap (\$100–\$250), these ingenious devices consist of a stainless-steel inner pot and an insulated outer layer. You bring the food to a boil in the inner pot on the stove and then place this in the outer layer, which vacuum-seals in the heat for cooking. "I fill the inner pot with food in the morning and then go to work," says Stella Ku, a Taiwanese-born Toronto resident and property manager in the conservation field. "When I come home at night, the food is warm and ready." Stella's pot cooks everything from chili and soup to pot roast and chicken.



Was it the Bass Amps or the Painkillers?

For years, doctors have warned us about the potential damage caused by the overuse of OTC painkillers: GI bleeds with ASA and ibuprofen and liver impairment with acetaminophen. Now there's another reason to go easy with these analgesics: potential hearing impairment, especially in men under age 50. Boston researchers led by Dr. Sharon Curhan studied almost 27,000 men in the Health Professionals Follow-up Study. They reported in the *American Journal of Medicine* that the use of acetaminophen at least twice a week by men under 50 doubles the risk of hearing loss; ibuprofen and related non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs increases the risk by nearly two-thirds; and regular use of ASA increases it by about a third. Users over 50 suffered less hearing loss, but all men had an increased risk with the use of these analgesics.

The study took into account hearing-loss factors such as exposure to loud noise, alcohol, hypertension, diabetes and the diuretic furosemide. The investigators think these drugs may damage the inner ear. And although the study did not look at women, similar effects may well apply to females.



Sex, Age, Health and Gender

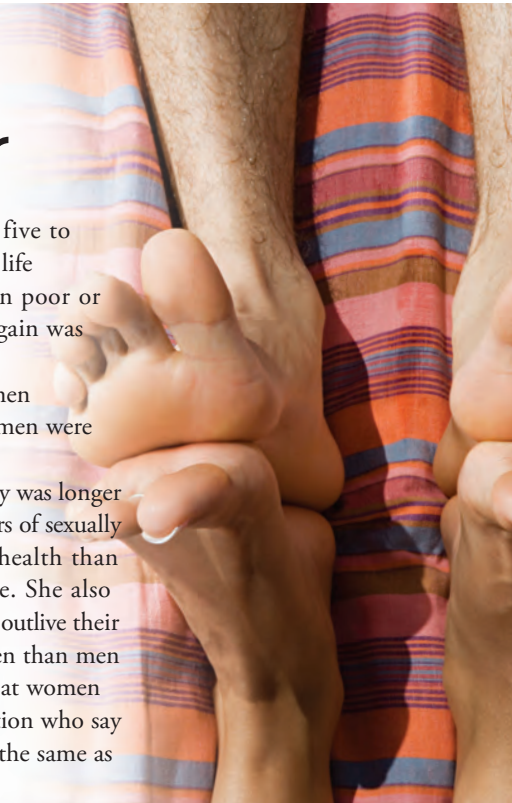
Not surprisingly, those in good health are nearly twice as likely to be interested in sex in middle and older age and more apt to have an active sex life. Furthermore, sexual life expectancy differs by gender. These findings come from a U.S. study of more than 6,000 subjects, published in the *British Medical Journal*. Lead author Dr. Stacy Tessler Lindau, associate professor of obstetrics/gynecology and geriatrics at the University of Chicago, reported the following.

- At age 30, sexually active life expectancy was 34.7 years for men and 30.7 years for women.
- At age 55, the expectancy was 14.9 to 15.3 years for men and 10.6 years for women.
- At age 55, men in very good or excellent

health gained an average of five to seven years of sexually active life compared with their peers in poor or fair health. For women, the gain was three to six years.

- At ages 75 to 85, 38.9% of men compared with 16.8% of women were sexually active.

“Sexually active life expectancy was longer for men, but men lost more years of sexually active life as a result of poor health than women,” Tessler Lindau wrote. She also noted that since women tend to outlive their partnerships, more adult women than men lack partners. “But if you look at women who have partners, the proportion who say they’re sexually active is about the same as men who have partners.”



Chew Your Way to Fewer Infections

Most people associate probiotics with intestinal health (see p. 53). But now there's a new live-bacteria product that aims to fight the oral germs behind bad breath, strep throat, sinusitis and earaches: Probiotic Gum with BLIS K12. Developed by New Zealand microbiologist Dr. John Tagg, who collaborated with researchers at the University of British Columbia, it's manufactured by Coquitlam, B.C.-based CulturedCare, a division of Prairie Naturals. Sold in pharmacies as well as health and nutrition stores, each piece of mint- or fruit-flavoured, sugar-free gum delivers 500 million active *Streptococcus salivarius* K12 bacteria, a benign strain that inhibits harmful microorganisms. **\$5.99 to \$7.99** for an eight-piece package.

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Kitchen Garden

The foods on your table have cousins in your summer flowerbeds, whether you planted them yourself or they crashed the garden gate on their own. Match the herb, fruit or vegetable with its closest garden-variety relative.

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|---|------------|------------|
| 1 | Sage | Thistle |
| 2 | Tomato | Dandelion |
| 3 | Raspberry | Nasturtium |
| 4 | Artichoke | Rose |
| 5 | Asparagus | Lily |
| 6 | Watercress | Salvia |
| 7 | Radicchio | Lupin |
| 8 | Green pea | Nightshade |

