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Newsletter

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What Makes for the Ideal Doctor?

Steven Covey has made a fortune from his bestselling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. A new study of patients treated in Arizona and Minnesota, incidentally, shows that there are seven habits that make for a highly effective doctor.

In the study, researchers conducted interviews with 192 patients seen in 14 different medical specialties of the Mayo Clinic system. Patients were asked to describe their best - and worst - experiences with a doctor at the clinic, and to give specifics of their encounters. The researchers then checked transcripts of the interviews to identify traits that patients favored or disliked.

According to the patients, the ideal doctor would be confident, empathetic, humane, personal, forthright, respectful, and thorough. Of those traits, "thorough" was named most often by patients. Conversely, the patients listed seven traits they associated with bad doctors - timid, uncaring, misleading, cold, callous, disrespectful and hurried.

While the quality of a patient's relationship with their doctor is often overlooked, it is extremely important. Not only does it affect a patient's comfort level with their doctor, it can also have an effect on how the patient responds to the doctor's treatments or recommendations.

Bendapudi NM, Berry LL, Frey KA, et al. Patients' perspective on ideal physician behaviors. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* March 2006;81(3):338-344.

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Antibiotics May Double Asthma Risks in Kids

Children treated with antibiotics during their first year are twice as likely to develop asthma, according to a study released Monday. "Although the causal nature between antibiotics and asthma is still unclear, our overall results show that treatment with at least one antibiotic as an infant appears to be associated with the development of childhood asthma," said study lead author Carlo Marra of the University of British Columbia. "By identifying potential risk factors for asthma and educating patients and families about risk factors, we may begin to see a reduction in the overall incidence of asthma," said W. Michael Alberts, president of the American College of Chest Physicians.

In the study, which appears in the March issue of *Chest*, Marra and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of seven studies that compared exposure to antibiotics to no exposure during the first year of life. The analysis concluded that infants exposed to at least one antibiotic were twice as likely as unexposed infants to develop asthma during childhood. The researchers also found that additional courses of antibiotics during the first year of life were associated with an increase in the risk a child would later develop asthma.

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Tanning May Become Addictive

A Wake Forest University study suggests frequent tanning might become addictive. Researchers from the university's Baptist Medical Center say their study suggests ultraviolet light has "feel-good" effects that may be similar to those of some addictive drugs. "We had previously shown that ultraviolet light has an effect on mood that tanners value," said Dr. Mandeep Kaur, the study's lead author. "Now ... we've shown some tanners actually experience withdrawal symptoms when the 'feel-good' chemicals are blocked." The research was designed to test the hypothesis that exposure to ultraviolet light may produce endorphins -- brain chemicals that can cause euphoric feelings. "The finding was unexpected and is consistent with the hypothesis that frequent tanning may be driven, in part, by a mild dependence on opioids, most likely endorphins," said Dr. Steven Feldman, senior researcher and a professor of dermatology. The research is detailed in the April issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*.

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Tongue Piercing Can Be Dangerous

U.S. report warns that tongue piercing can cause dangerous and even fatal infections. An article in the journal *General Dentistry* describes a young woman who developed a large lump next to her piercing. She called the lump her “second tongue,” and it proved to be a growing mass of scar tissue.

Replacing her tongue stud with a shorter one and better oral hygiene, including use of a hydrogen peroxide mouthwash, improved the situation. Dr. Ellis Neiburger, the lead author of the study, recommends keeping the wound from the piercing clean and using plastic caps to keep the stud in place instead of metal. Dr. Melvin Pierson, a spokesman for the Academy of General Dentistry, suggests that the best procedure is to avoid tongue piercing. He said that unclean equipment can cause infections and patients can infect themselves if they touch the piercing with their hands.

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Bad Marriages Can Be Sickening

A U.S. study shows that an unhappy marriage can weaken the immune system and lead to bad health. The study, funded by the federal National Institute on Aging, showed that although marriage is generally good for people -- helping them live longer, happier and more prosperous lives -- personal conflict can make people feel sick, *The Chicago Sun-Times* reported.

For some couples, researchers say, poor health affects how people perceive their marriages. The stress of caring for an ill person or the orneriness of a sick spouse can turn once-happy marriages miserable. Marital difficulties appear to matter more for our health as we age, noted researchers at the Population Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin. In their paper, titled “You Make Me Sick: Marital Quality and Health Over the Life Course,” researchers analyzed interviews with 1,049 married people, asking them to rate on a 5-point scale how satisfied they were with their marriages.

This is “yet another reason to identify marital difficulties and seek to improve marital quality” because “your very health may depend on it,” wrote Debra Umberson, the study’s lead researcher.

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Many Give Up Healthy Eating on Weekends

Many U.S. adults toss healthy eating habits out the window on weekends, researchers at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center report. “I think the weekend phenomenon is a reward people feel like they deserve at the end of the work week,” said Bernadette Latson, a registered dietitian at the Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

“It’s a good idea not to be overly restrictive, but when people begin the weekend indulgence at lunch Friday, that’s three days, or almost half the week.” Dinner at a good restaurant once a week is usually sufficient in keeping people feeling satisfied and not deprived, said Latson. “But a single meal need not turn into a weekend of high-calorie meals,” she said. Latson suggests a Saturday night spent cooking a big meal is a good way to curb the desire to eat anything and everything throughout the weekend.

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Raspberries May Be Tops in Anti-Oxidants

Dutch researchers say raspberries may have 10 times more anti-oxidants than tomatoes or broccoli, and may contain anti-oxidants rarely found elsewhere. Researchers from Plant Research International in Wageningen, the Netherlands, said flash freezing raspberries in liquid nitrogen and storing them at minus 20 degrees Celsius destroys much of the vitamin C, but the anti-oxidant capacity remains. Processing the berry into jams may alter some of the anti-oxidants, but most of the valuable compounds remain, the researchers say.

“Raspberries contain vitamin C and anthocyanines, but these can also be found in other products,” says Jules Beekwilder. “However, approximately 50 percent of the anti-oxidant effect of raspberries is caused by ellagitannins. These you find in small doses in strawberries and practically nowhere else.” Some Chinese herbs may also be a source of those compounds, said the study published in *BioFactors*.

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Painkillers May Make Headaches Worse

Danish researchers say the common painkillers people reach for when they have a headache may actually make them feel worse.

A study in the journal *Ugeskrift for Læger* says a third of all headaches are actually caused by the medicine patients take to kill the pain, the Copenhagen Post reported.

“We knew that some headaches could be caused by overuse of over-the-counter medications, but this surprises us,” said Dr. Messoud Ashina of the Danish Headache Centre at the Glostrup County Hospital.

Ashina said that information sheets packaged with medications often do not state that they could exaggerate headache sufferers’ pain. He advises headache sufferers to keep a log of how much medicine they took, the newspaper said. “Our experience is that after a few months, people can see their own overuse,” he said.

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Soccer Helps Prevent Osteoporosis

Soccer – which combines weight-bearing exercise with running and jumping – has the greatest effect in preventing osteoporosis, a U.S. study finds. “Beyond the basic premise that kids need exercise, our study suggests that weight-bearing exercise with skeletal impact needs to be promoted during youth to preserve future bone health,” said James W. Bellew of Louisiana State University in Shreveport.

Study authors Bellew and Dr. Laura Gehrig compared bone mineral density in three groups of adolescent female athletes -- 29 swimmers, 16 soccer players and 19 weightlifters. Bone mineral density is a standard measure of bone strength, used in the diagnosis and monitoring of osteoporosis. Of the three groups, the soccer players had the highest BMD levels. Bone density was somewhat higher in weightlifters than in swimmers, although the difference was not significant.

Soccer and weightlifting are “weight-bearing” activities -- the extra load placed on the skeleton promotes bone development. Swimming is a “non-weight-bearing” activity, because the body’s weight is supported by the water. The findings are published in the journal *Pediatric Physical Therapy*.

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U.S. Teens Sleep-Deprived

Sleep deprivation has “a profound negative effect” on teens’ mood, school performance and cognitive function, Rhode Island researchers say. “Our results show that the adage ‘early to bed, early to rise’ presents a real challenge” for people 13-22 years old, said Mary Carskadon of Bradley Hospital and Brown Medical School.

That’s because the group has unique circadian rhythms that cause them fall asleep and wake up later than their younger and older counterparts, said Carskadon, who headed the U.S. National Sleep Foundation poll. Teens need nine to 10 hours of sleep a night, the researchers said. “This poll sends a clear message to parents: Teens are tired,” said Judy Owens of Hasbro Children’s Hospital. Parents should eliminate “sleep stealers” such as caffeinated drinks or TVs or computers in teens’ rooms and enforce reasonable bed times, said the pediatric sleep disorder expert. Sleep deprivation makes teens more than grumpy: It is a major reason people 16-29 are the top group of drivers to fall asleep and be in car crashes, researchers said.

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Vitamin Megadoses Pregnancy Threat

Heavy dosage of vitamin supplements could increase the risk of potentially dangerous pre-eclampsia in pregnant women, British research finds. Vitamins C and E were thought to cut the risk, but a Lancet study by the charity Tommy’s found women at high-risk should not take large doses of any kind of vitamins.

Up to 25,000 British women are affected annually by pre-eclampsia, which causes blood pressure to rise to levels which threatens mother and child, the BBC said.

The ailment has been linked to the production of highly charged, toxic molecules. Some 2,400 expectant mothers with high blood pressure, kidney problems, clotting disorders or diabetes were given either extra vitamin supplements or a placebo. Researchers found pre-eclampsia appeared about a week earlier among those who received the vitamins. “Careful management has long been seen as the best way to deal with pre-eclampsia -- that remains the same,” the report said.

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What Really Makes Married Women Happy

The No. 1 factor in women's marital happiness is the "emotional engagement" of their husbands, University of Virginia researchers say. Husbands' commitment to and support of the union is more important than money and the division of household chores, concludes the study drawn from the 5,000-couple National Survey of Families and Households.

"Conventional and academic wisdom now suggests that the 'best' marriages are unions of equals," researcher Steven Nock said. "Our work suggests that the reality is more complicated." "Regardless of what married women say they believe about gender, they tend to have happier marriages when their husband is a good provider -- provided that he is also emotionally engaged," researcher W. Bradford Wilcox said. "I was very surprised to find that even egalitarian-minded women are happier when their marriages are organized along more gendered lines." The study published in the journal *Social Forces* found the most happily married women do not work outside the home and have husbands who earn the majority of the family's income.

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True Love Takes Year or Longer

It takes a year for couples to find that balance of passion, intimacy and commitment known as true love, British researchers at Bath University say. Sixty-one percent of the 147 couples studied from online dating service Match.com said their relationship was true love. The vast majority of the true-love voters were in relationships for a year or longer.

"Love is a multifaceted concept, but is viewed in our study as the combined feelings of intimacy, passion and commitment that one has for a partner," researcher Jeff Gavin told *The Guardian* newspaper. "It supports our belief that the Internet and e-mail does in fact encourage old-fashioned courtship ... that is all too infrequent when meeting potential partners on the bar scene," said Charlotte Harper of Match.com's British operations.

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