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Newsletter

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Relieving Back Pain the Natural Way

Back pain is the leading reason people seek out the services of a doctor of chiropractic for care. While spinal adjustments are the most popular method chiropractors use to treat back pain, they are by no means the only method. A review published by The Cochrane Collaboration has found that three herbs – devil’s claw, white willow bark and cayenne – also are effective in treating low back pain, and that in some instances, they work just as well as prescription drugs.

In the review, scientists examined 10 other studies involving more than 1,500 people who suffered from acute, subacute or chronic low back pain. The review showed “strong evidence” that a 60 milligram daily dose of devil’s claw was more effective than a placebo in the relief of back pain, and appeared to reduce back pain as much as a 12.5-milligram dose of Vioxx, a painkiller that was recently taken off of the market due to a number of adverse side-effects. A 240 milligram daily dose of white willow bark also had the same effect as a 12.5 milligram dose of Vioxx. Cayenne, which was tested as a type of plaster applied to the skin, reduced pain more than a placebo, and was just as effective as Spiroflor, a popular homeopathic gel.

Of course, it’s important to note that while these herbs appear to be effective in treating back pain, they are not entirely without some side-effects of their own, at least in certain circumstances. Devil’s claw, for instance, may cause an upset stomach, while white willow bark can reduce the effectiveness of blood-thinning medications. As such, people who are taking blood thinners or are sensitive to certain herbs may want to seek out other natural forms of back pain relief -- such as an adjustment from their chiropractor!

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Most Don’t Use Enough Sunscreen

Recent reports indicate that although the U.S. public may be using sunscreen, it is being incorrectly applied and used far too sparingly.

“The average person requires one ounce of sunscreen, enough to fill a shot glass, to adequately cover the exposed areas of the body,” advised Dr. Barbara A. Gilchrest, professor and chair of the department of dermatology at Boston University School of Medicine.

“However, the majority of people don’t use enough sunscreen to receive the level of protection that is indicated on the package.” Many people also fail to apply sunscreen at least 15 to 30 minutes before going outdoors in order to allow it to be completely absorbed into the skin, and they neglect to re-apply it every two hours or after swimming, according to Gilchrest.

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Bicycle Helmets No Panacea

Bicycle helmets are a good idea and may be the law in some U.S. communities, but that can’t protect against every kind of injury, says a neurologist. Dr. Ramon Diaz-Arrastia, associate professor of neurology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, says helmets can protect against skull fractures but can still leave a child susceptible to closed-head injuries such as concussions.

“People need to be aware that wearing a helmet is no panacea,” he says. “So have your child wear a helmet, but make sure he or she still knows how to ride safely.” A properly fitting bike helmet should be horizontal on the head, with a snug but comfortable fit, using the manufacturer’s foam pads if necessary, according to Diaz-Arrastia. “The front should be about two fingertips’ width above the eyes, the ‘Y’ of the side straps should meet just below the ear, and the chin strap should be snug enough that when the child opens his or her mouth very wide, the helmet will pull down a bit,” said Diaz-Arrastia.

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Fresh-Cut Fruit Doesn't Lose Antioxidants

Cutting and packaging fruit had almost no effect on Vitamin C and other antioxidants, according to a study by the University of California-Davis. The researchers obtained pineapples, mangoes, cantaloupes, watermelons, strawberries and kiwifruits from wholesale commercial sources in California. The fruit was taken to a laboratory at the University of California in Davis and half of each lot was processed as fresh-cut and half left whole.

Both lots were refrigerated under identical conditions for nine days and then tested for nutrient content, which showed only small losses of antioxidant compounds in the cut fruit compared to fruit left whole. In fact, levels of some antioxidants in fresh-cut mango and watermelon actually increased due to exposure to light, according to the study published in the *Journal of Agricultural & Food Chemistry*.

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Consequences of Excessive Internet Use

While not yet defined as a true addiction, many U.S. Internet users suffer the consequences of obsession with the online world. The Internet has properties that for some individuals promote addictive behaviors and pseudo-intimate interpersonal relationships, according to a study published in *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*. Online marital infidelity, or cybersex, can lead to divorce and harm personal relationships, according to researcher Diane M. Wieland.

Previous studies have reported that “approximately 9 million people, or 15 percent of Internet users, accessed one of the top adult websites in a one-month period.” Physical symptoms of excessive Internet use include dry eyes, carpal tunnel syndrome and headaches. “A focus on the computer and lack of attention to daily reality is indicative of poor judgment and results on lowered grades in school, job loss and indebtedness,” said Wieland.

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Alternative Care for Ear Infections

Israeli researchers have found about half of children admitted to a major treatment facility for acute middle-ear infections receive alternative care.

The most common therapy given for the ear infection was immune-boosting preparations containing *Echinacea Purpurea*. There is no evidence showing this product is effective against this common pediatric medical disorder, according to Drs. Michael Rotstein and Ari DeRowe, both with the Dana Children's Hospital, Tel-Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, Sackler School of Medicine, Tel-Aviv University.

Some of the complementary and alternative medicine given in the treatment of acute otitis media, or middle-ear infection, include certain types of herbal medicine, osteopathy, chiropractic, homeopathy, dietary modification, naturopathy and other remedies. The findings will be presented at the 21st annual meeting of the American Society of Pediatric Otolaryngology in Chicago.

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Glucose Explains Nap After Eating

British scientists say glucose can stop brain cells from producing the signals that keep humans awake – explaining why many get tired after eating. “It has been known for a while that people can become sleepy and less active after a meal, but brain signals responsible for this were poorly understood said study leader Dr. Denis Burdakov of the University of Manchester.

“We have pinpointed how glucose -- the sugar in food -- can stop brain cells from producing signals that keep us awake.” The findings, published in the journal *Neuron*, showed how glucose blocks or “inhibits” neurons that make orexins -- tiny proteins that are vital for normal regulation of a body's state of consciousness. “These cells are critical for responding to the ever-changing body-energy state with finely orchestrated changes in arousal, food seeking, hormone release and metabolic rate to ensure that the brain always has adequate glucose,” said Burdakov. Malfunction of orexin neurons can lead to narcolepsy, where sufferers cannot stay awake, and obesity, according to Burdakov.

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Outdoor Falls More Common in Elderly

Outdoor falls by U.S. adults age 45 and older are a largely preventable and often overlooked health issue, according to a study by California researchers. A study published in the July issue of American Journal of Public Health examined the data on 2,193 falls that resulted in injury among adults age 45 and older in California between 1996 and 2001.

The study found outdoor falls were far more common than indoor falls, yet most educational efforts have been aimed at preventing indoor falls among the elderly. In addition, 73 percent of the outdoor falls were caused by such "environmental factors" as slippery sidewalks, uneven surfaces, or objects on sidewalks, curbs or streets. Walking was the most common fall-related activity and accounted for almost 50 percent of the outdoor falls reported.

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Blood Donors Can Donate Every 56 Days

Blood donations typically drop in the summer, so U.S. blood banks are asking for more donors and for occasional donors to become regular donors. "The need for blood is constant," said Dr. Nicole C. Prall, a pathologist at Indiana University Medical Center in Indianapolis. "As a pathologist, I manage the blood supply at my hospital and know that the summer months are typically challenging for blood donations." During the school year, donations from high school and college students account for approximately 15 percent of blood collections. Also in the summer, office blood drives have smaller turnouts because of vacations. "The most effective way to avoid blood shortages is encourage routine donations. Studies show that about 5 percent of healthy Americans eligible to give blood, actually do, and unfortunately many do not give on a regular basis," said Prall. "Donors don't realize that they can give blood every 56 days." To help the occasional donor become a more frequent donor, the College of American Pathologists encourages Americans to schedule a blood-donation e-mail reminder through its Web site, myhealthtestreminder.com.

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Crash Dieting Triggers Hunger

The brain's response to low-calorie diets or all-protein or all-carbohydrate diets is to increase natural chemicals that cause hunger, says a U.S. expert. "Two kinds of appetite exist: metabolic and hedonic -- metabolic appetite is a need for energy or calories. If we restrict calories too severely, the brain's hunger mechanism kicks in, and it's hard to stick with a diet when you are hungry," says Mary Boggiano, a psychologist at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. "Hedonic appetite occurs if we restrict ourselves to only certain kinds of foods, or bland foods, or foods we don't like -- like a lot of people do when they're dieting -- our brain's reward system kicks in and causes us to crave yummy tasting foods." This involves changes in dopamine and endorphins in the brain, the two kinds of chemicals also involved in drug addiction -- these changes can cause cravings for very tasty foods, especially when under stress, according to Boggiano. Boggiano recommends that all adults eat at least 1,200 calories a day; don't skip favorite foods, but limit the amount; and exercise to raise metabolism and decrease hunger.

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Most Drownings Preventable

Unless U.S. children receive proper water safety and swimming lessons, pools, water parks and bathtubs can be dangerous places, says the American Red Cross. On average, 9 people in the United States drown every day, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. Despite minority children having less access to a water-related environment, 40 percent of the deaths from drowning are predominantly in African-American and Hispanic communities, according to the Red Cross. The Red Cross says that there are some 5,000 U.S. drowning and near-drowning accidents each year, but most of these accidents could have been prevented with proper training. The Red Cross advises that everyone should learn to swim and no one, even adults, should ever swim alone. A child should never be left unattended near water -- not even for a moment -- and basic lifesaving equipment should be near all residential pools, the Red Cross says.

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Losing Fitness Motivation After Vacation

Laying at the pool, bellying up to the buffet and sleeping late can take a toll on one's normal exercise program, according to a U.S. fitness expert. While the extra eating and less exercise can lead to vacation-related weight gain, the real problem is losing motivation to return to a daily exercise program once the vacation is over, according to Michelle Miller, clinical professor in the Department of Kinesiology in Indiana University Bloomington's School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation. "Physiologically, you can stop exercising for up to about 10 days and you should still be able to pick up where you left off," said Miller. "But what actually happens is that people come back from being on a trip and don't want vacation to be over. The real hurdle is not that you've lost your fitness base but that you don't want to get back to reality." The motivation to exercise should go beyond wanting to look good on the beach, or there will be no reason to resume workouts once the vacation is over, according to Miller.

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Calcium, Vitamin D Needed by Women

Mayo Clinic doctors in Rochester, Minn., recommend that women consume adequate daily amounts of calcium and vitamin D through diet, supplements, or both. The Women's Health Initiative study recently found that women taking calcium may still be at risk of fracture if they have other factors that compromise bone health, but Mayo Clinic doctors continue to recommend that daily calcium intake should be 1,500 milligrams of elemental calcium and at least 400 international units of vitamin D up to age 75. After age 75, women should increase vitamin D to 600 IU and do regular weight-bearing exercises, advises the June issue of Mayo Clinic Health Letter. Osteoporosis risk factors include parents or siblings who have had fractures due to bone thinning; thin or small-framed people who weigh under 129 pounds much of their adult life; long-term use of corticosteroid drugs, some anti-seizure medications and blood thinners can adversely affect bone health; tobacco use, alcohol use, an inactive lifestyle and low calcium and vitamin D intake.

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Exercise Keeps Arteries Healthy

Even in healthy people free of arteriosclerosis, age takes its toll on arteries, but regular exercise helps keeps arteries healthy, say U.S. researchers.

Exercise helps prevent arteriosclerosis in a number of ways -- it keeps arteries healthy by lowering bad cholesterol and boosting good cholesterol and reduces other risk factors for arteriosclerosis and blood clots such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and stress, according to the Harvard Men's Health Watch. Regular exercise also helps arteries by boosting the production of nitric oxide by the cells lining the arteries, which helps circulation. And new research in mice suggests that exercise stimulates the bone marrow to produce new cells for the arterial lining, which replace aging cells and repair damaged arteries. As people age, arteries become stiffer, stickier and narrower, but scientists in Italy found that in people who exercised regularly, age had a much smaller effect on arteries. "You don't have to be a triathlete to help your arteries stay young," said says Dr. Harvey Simon, editor in chief of the Harvard Men's Health Watch. "Just two to three miles of brisk walking nearly every day will help."

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