

DR. LAURA T. BRAYTON

(201) 792 3544

50 Harrison Street Suite 218
Hoboken, NJ 07030

Newsletter

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Nutrition for Neck and Back Pain

Estimates show that between 5 - 10 % of the U.S. population uses nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) for pain relief. While NSAIDs are effective in treating both acute and chronic pain, they also may cause a myriad of complications, ranging from headaches and stomach ulcers to dizziness, constipation and diarrhea. A new study indicates that omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oil may be just as effective as NSAIDs in treating pain, without causing the same side effects.

In this study, scientists evaluated 250 patients who were suffering from nonsurgical neck pain or back pain, and who were taking NSAIDs for pain relief. The patients were asked to take 2,400 milligrams of omega-3 supplements per day for two weeks, and then to reduce the dosage to 1,200 milligrams daily. Approximately one month after starting supplementation, the patients were mailed a questionnaire asking them to document their level of pain, use of NSAIDs, and any side effects caused by the supplements. One hundred twenty-five patients returned the questionnaire, an average of 75 days after taking the supplements. Seventy-eight percent were taking 1,200 milligrams of omega-3s; the remainder had continued taking 2,400 milligrams. More than half of the patients (59 percent) reported they had discontinued using NSAIDs for pain control; 60 percent said their overall pain levels had improved; and 80 percent stated that they were satisfied with the improvement in pain. No adverse side effects were reported.

As the results of this study show, omega-3 fatty acids appear just as effective as NSAIDs, if not more so, in relieving certain kinds of neck and back pain. That said, there is no better form of natural back pain relief than an adjustment from your local doctor of chiropractic. If you suffer from neck or back pain, make an appointment with your DC today; they will find the source of your pain and treat you accordingly -- and they might even recommend some omega-3s.

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Kids Eat More While Watching TV

A Penn State study finds children who usually eat meals in front of the television at home eat more in a laboratory setting when they are shown a cartoon. Children who do not watch television at home actually ate less on days when they were shown a cartoon. "The study shows that TV viewing can either increase or decrease preschool children's food intakes and suggests that when children consistently view TV during meals, TV viewing may distract children from normal fullness cues which can lead to overeating in children as it may in adults," said Dr. Lori Francis, the lead researcher. The researchers say that children should not be allowed to watch television while they are eating at home. The study was published by the Journal of the American Dietetic Association.

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Healthy Snacking, More Meals, Can Be Good

Some U.S. studies suggest that eating smaller, more frequent meals than the standard three meals a day may help control weight. Four to six smaller but regularly spaced meals may keep a person from becoming ravenously hungry and overeating at the next meal, according to the May issue of Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource. "Eating more often also helps give you energy throughout the day," the newsletter said. Researchers speculate that eating frequent small meals is more compatible with a physically active lifestyle than the habit of skipping earlier meals and eating a larger one in the evening. In fact, skipping breakfast is associated with a greater prevalence of obesity.

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50 Million Americans Face Chronic Pain

Chronic pain, defined as any physical discomfort lasting for at least six months, affects up to 50 million U.S. adults, says a study. Common forms of chronic pain include headaches, backaches, arthritis, respiratory conditions and ailments caused by sports injuries or other traumas, such as car accidents.

Wayne Hochwarter, of the Florida State University's College of Business in Tallahassee, Fla., has conducted several studies to examine the role of chronic pain on work factors such as job stress, employee performance and organizational profitability. In one study, Hochwarter asked more than 2,000 employees to report the number of hours per week that pain caused them to be ineffective, and he found chronic pain accounts for over five hours per week of lost productivity.

"When projected over the course of the year, we are talking about more than \$5,000 per employee," he said. Most employees try to keep their pain a secret because they are afraid of the consequences if employers find out, according to Hochwarter.

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Bullying Keeps Obese Children from Sports

Bullying may keep overweight children on playground sidelines, making it more difficult for them to shed pounds, say University of Florida researchers. Lead author Eric Storch, assistant professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at the University of Florida College of Medicine, says bullying leads overweight children to avoid situations where they have been picked on before, such as gym class and sports.

About one out of every five children is chronically bullied and aside from causing its victims to avoid events where they might be teased, bullying is also linked to depression and loneliness, according to Storch. "We found that as rates of peer victimization among overweight kids went up, rates of physical activity went down," he said. Negative attitudes toward exercise can last a lifetime, making it more difficult for overweight children to lose weight and making it easier for them to become obese adults, according to the study published in the online edition of the Journal of Pediatric Psychology.

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Protective Eyewear Can Prevent Injuries

Many of the some 27,000 eye injuries treated at U.S. hospitals each year could be avoided if people wore protective eyewear, says a researcher. "Some 90 percent of eye injuries are preventable with better education and appropriate use of safety eyewear during activities with a high risk of eye injury," said study Huiyun Xiang, an assistant professor of pediatrics at Ohio State University.

"While it can be quite costly to put special prescription lenses into already expensive, yet safe, frames, working-age adults who work in hazardous areas may want to consider using protective safety goggles." People 65 and older were much more likely than younger adults to fall and hit their head, thus causing a glasses-related injury, while sports-related eyeglass injuries were more common in children 17 and younger, according to Xiang. "For children who wear glasses, it's important that parents know that prescription eyeglasses aren't able to take the same kind of impact that sport-specific eyewear can," Xiang said. "These kinds of glasses are typically much more flexible and impact-resistant."

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Mom's Nutrition Affects Child Behavior

Mothers whose 3-year-olds are misbehaving may have eaten the wrong foods during pregnancy, reports a study presented at a San Francisco conference. Dr. Laura Murray-Kolb, a postdoctoral fellow at Penn State, led the study, which found that children born to iron-deficient teenage mothers were less active at age three than children whose mothers were not iron deficient. "While many previous studies have shown that maternal nutrition affects the physical health and development of the child, this study adds to the growing evidence that a mother's nutritional status in pregnancy also affects the behavior and personality of the child as well," Dr. Murray-Kolb said. The study examined sixty teenage mothers, ages 14 through 19, from a mid-size Pennsylvania town.

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Blood Pressure Lower Taken in Chair with Feet on Floor

Systolic blood pressure can be an average of 14 points higher when taken immediately after arriving in the exam room. A team of nurses headed by Melly Turner at the University of Virginia Health System found all study participants had lower systolic and diastolic blood-pressure measurements when seated in a chair vs. the exam table. With a desirable blood-pressure reading around 120/80 and the American Heart Association's definition of hypertension as 140/90 or greater on two consecutive tests, a 14-point difference can mean the difference between a clean bill of health and an inaccurate diagnosis, according to Turner.

"Our study reaffirmed the American Heart Association's technique that patients should sit in a calm environment with feet flat on the floor, resting their back against the chair for at least five minutes before taking a blood pressure measurement on a bare arm at heart level," said Turner. Turner presented the findings at the meeting of the Preventative Cardiovascular Nurses Association in Denver and other members of the team presented the findings at the 5th Annual Medical Surgical Conference at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond.

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Boomer Women Exercise Less to Lose Weight

A University of Michigan study of baby-boomer women found that women who exercise to look better exercise 40% less than other women. Michelle Segar, a University of Michigan psychology researcher says women who exercise to lose weight exercise the least.

The study found that women in their 40's appeared to have a greater chance of maintaining exercise habits when the exercise is for a non-body shape reason, such as reducing stress, increasing a sense of well-being, or for the intrinsic enjoyment of the activity itself for social reasons, such as wanting to do something with a friend. Women who exercise to lose weight or change their body shape may select physical activities based on how many calories they burn, rather than on how much they will like doing that activity -- a recipe for eventually quitting, according to the study. "We're all so busy," Segar said. "Who has time to fit in an activity you don't really enjoy?"

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Seniors Focus on Positive

U.S. older adults' attention tilts toward positive feelings and associations, despite their time-limited future that comes with advancing age. A Brandeis University study, published in the journal *Psychology and Aging*, suggests that old age itself motivates adults to keep negative information out of the "spotlight" and focus instead on positive information. "The study suggests that the way individuals in late life process information enables them to stay on an even emotional keel and feel good," explained lead author, psychologist Derek M. Isaacowitz.

Using eye-tracking technology the researchers recorded the duration and location of the test subjects' gaze as they looked at a series of synthetic faces portraying sadness, anger, fear and happiness. The older participants ages 57 to 84 preferred the happy faces and avoided the angry ones, while the younger subjects ages 18 to 21 showed only a preference for the fearful faces. "Contrary to conventional wisdom, which suggests that advancing age motivates people to dwell on negative feelings, just the opposite seems to be the case, at least in many elderly," said Isaacowitz.

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Parents Should Tell Children of Childhood

Parents sharing stories of their childhood can be a great way to bond, to teach story structure and to show children who they are, says an U.S. expert. It's also important for children to know that parents have struggled with many of the same issues and problems they're experiencing, whether it's making friends or learning to swim, according to University of Alabama at Birmingham education expert Deborah Strevy. "Storytelling has been around for thousands of years. Unfortunately, our busy lifestyles today don't allow for extended conversations among family members, and we miss the opportunity to share the stories of our families," she said. "Sharing stories gives children insight into their parents' values -- kids only see their parents as competent. Children need to know parents weren't always that way."

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Biofeedback Helpful for Many Conditions

U.S. biofeedback professionals believe anyone can learn to control breathing and other responses to help with headaches or lower blood pressure. Biofeedback uses techniques and computerized instruments to identify information about subtle, involuntary physiological changes within the body -- muscle tension, sweating, increased heart rate and shallow breathing -- in response to different stressors.

During a biofeedback session, a therapist places sensors on the body to monitor a response to stress. The information is fed back to the person via visual and audio cues, such as a computerized display or a tone that changes frequency. With this feedback, the therapist can help people learn to control responses by breathing slowly to reduce anxiety. Biofeedback is used to treat many health conditions, including backaches, teeth grinding, high blood pressure, anxiety, migraines and asthma, according to the April issue of the Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource.

About half of the people treated with biofeedback report that their symptoms improve by 50 percent to 80 percent after about six to 20 sessions with a therapist, the report said.

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Drinking While Pregnant May Affect Brain

Routine ultrasounds show that heavy drinkers who continue to imbibe while pregnant may have fetuses with reduced skull and brain growth, found a U.S. study. Although the alcohol-exposed babies' growth remained within normal range, the findings reveal effects of drinking on the developing human brain, according to lead author Nancy Handmaker, a University of New Mexico clinical psychologist.

"What this tells us is that the earlier you abstain in a pregnancy, the better the outcome," said Handmaker. The study authors obtained routine ultrasound data from 167 pregnant women who had reported a history of hazardous drinking before pregnancy with 97 classified as heavy drinkers. "The provision of feedback on fetal development as revealed in ultrasonography may be a strategy to encourage heavy drinkers to seek treatment during pregnancy," the study authors concluded. The study appears in the May issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

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Sunglasses Protect from UV Radiation

As sunny weather returns, a U.S. ophthalmologist says sunglasses are more than a fashion statement -- they protect against ultraviolet radiation. "Sunglasses should be used by adults and children when they're outdoors for prolonged periods of time," says Dr. V. Vinod Mootha, associate professor of ophthalmology specializing in cornea, external disease, refractive and cataract surgery at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. Ultraviolet radiation exposure, which is particularly damaging to the surface of the eye and to the cornea, is higher on sunny days -- especially at noon and during low-ozone days as well, according to Mootha. "Excessive exposure may increase the risk for the formation of a fleshy tissue over the cornea, some forms of cataract and possibly macular degeneration," says Mootha. For people who wear eyeglasses, polycarbonate lenses that are thin and shatterproof offer protection from ultraviolet radiation, Mootha adds.

Beans: Eat More, Weigh Less

A U.S. study finds that people who eat beans weigh less than those who don't. Using data from the National Nutrition and Health Examination Survey 1999-2002 the study found:

- + Adult bean eaters consume less saturated fat than non-bean eaters and have a 22% lower risk of obesity.
- + Adult and teen bean eaters have smaller waist sizes -- $\frac{1}{2}$ inch and 1 inch, respectively.
- + Fiber intake of adult and teen bean eaters is more than 1/3 higher than non-bean eaters.

"Beans are an excellent source of fiber. Previous studies have shown that high-fiber diets may help reduce body weight, so this makes sense," says study author Victor Fulgoni. "They are naturally low in fat and cholesterol-free." The study found that adults who eat beans weigh 6.6 pounds less yet eat 199 more daily calories than adults who don't eat beans.

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