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Newsletter

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Watching Your Back at Work

Sitting in front of a computer screen with your body planted into an anything-but-comfortable chair can definitely do a number on your lower back. Add to that the stress which sometimes goes along with the 9-to-5 workday and your back is in for trouble. A recent study in Finland has found that a little exercise can go a long way at the office.

A group of office workers who had complained that their back pain was restricting their effectiveness on the job were measured by the researchers before teaching them some simple exercises that could help with their daily backaches. Over 15 weeks the workers were taught and performed various forms of light resistance training.

The study showed a statistically significant decrease in the intensity of low back pain symptoms attributable to exercising. After exercising for only five minutes every day during the work week subjects' back pain decreased by 19 percent.

Doctors of chiropractic treat back pain with a number of different techniques, including adjustments, stretching and strength exercises, and hot/cold therapy..

Sjogren T, Nissinen K, Jarvenpaa S, et al. Effects of a workplace physical exercise intervention on the intensity of low back symptoms in office workers: A cluster randomized controlled cross-over design. *Journal of Back and Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation*, 2006;19(1): 13-24.

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Handful of Nuts Cuts Heart Risk

A European study has confirmed that regularly eating nuts, including peanuts, can help reduce risk of coronary heart disease. Peanuts have been shown to be protective against heart disease and contribute to lowering blood cholesterol in a published research based on U.S. population studies.

However, for the first time, the association between nut consumption and health in nearly 400,000 Europeans has been studied to take account of the different dietary habits and nut intake patterns between Americans and Europeans. The researchers identified that nearly half of Europeans rarely consume nuts, yet an intake of just two servings of nuts per week, where each serving is about a handful -- one ounce -- may reduce risk of death from coronary heart disease by 11 percent.

"The important thing is that very modest consumption is associated with protection," said Elio Riboli, professor of cancer epidemiology at Imperial College in London. "A small plate of nuts with a glass of wine would be a healthy amount. A classic aperitif accompanied by a dish of nuts at least twice a week would be an ideal combination."

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Dancing Can Be Good Workout

Regardless of sex, generation or income, more U.S. adults are seeking their workout via the dance floor, says a New York physiologist. "The best exercise program is one that is safe, balanced, promotes fitness and importantly, one people will do regularly because they enjoy it," says Polly de Mille, exercise physiologist at the Women's Sports Medicine Center at Hospital for Special Surgery. "The social aspects of dance help to make it very attractive for an increasing number of people versus, say, an elliptical training machine." One study demonstrated improved range of hip motion and flexibility of the spine on young adults who followed a three-month program of dance training. Dance movements are also weight-bearing and varied compared to something like a stationary bike. That is important for maintaining or improving bone density, according to de Mille. Studies of older populations who engage in dance-based exercise programs demonstrate improvement in balance and agility. ABC-TV's "Dancing with the Stars" is also fueling the popularity of dance; however, De Mille warns that some of televised moves should not be tried at home.

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Salad a Day, Goes a Long Way

A study of 17,000 U.S. adults finds that eating just one salad a day provides even greater health benefits than previously thought. Researchers at the University of California School of Public Health and Louisiana State University Health Science found those who eat salads and raw vegetables with salad dressing have considerably higher levels of vitamins C, E, B6 and folic acid. "Eating a salad a day is a convenient way to easily improve your nutritional status," said lead researcher Dr. Lenore Arab of the UCLA School of Public Health. "Just one salad daily helps to satisfy the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which recommends eating two and a half cups of vegetables each day for a 2,000-calorie diet." However, less than 50 percent of the U.S. population meets the daily recommendation for vegetables necessary for healthy living. Adding salad dressing not only adds flavor but increases the absorption of certain nutrients being consumed because fat can enhance the absorption of nutrients, according to Arab. The study was published in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association.

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Child Going to College Changes Family

It's a big deal when a child goes off to college for the first time; every family member's life changes, according to a U.S. expert. "It's normal to take at least a whole semester for everyone to adjust to the changes and challenges," said Cindy Webster, counseling center director at Tennessee Technological University. "Don't put pressure on yourself to have everything worked out in a few days or weeks." Siblings may resent the relaxed rules a college student can now follow or just miss spending time with their brother or sister, while moms and dads face decisions about how to communicate and relate to a child transitioning from high school to college, says Webster. "Parents, don't take it personally. Remember, your child's independence means you've done your job in teaching them how to be adults," said Webster. "Take pride in seeing your child grow." Tell the college student before changing his or her bedroom into a study, workout room or a guest bedroom so they are not shocked when they come home for the first time and find their bedroom is no longer their personal space, advises Webster.

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Kids Teeth Brushing Suboptimal

Eighty-one percent of U.S. parents report that there is some problem with the way their children brush their teeth, a survey found. Although 70% of parents say they've engaged in an activity to motivate their children to brush or make brushing more fun, 49% of the parents say their children do not brush often enough, 40% say their children brush only once a day and 30% miss spots. Children equate brushing their teeth to be as bad as eating vegetables and going to the doctor or dentist, according to the survey of 500 adults with children ages 6 to 12 for the makers of Listerine. Twenty-eight percent of the parents said their children dislike brushing their teeth and 38% of children do not want to visit the dentist. The most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta indicates that 41% of children ages 2 to 11 had tooth decay in their primary teeth -- a statistic that has not decreased in nearly two decades. Compounding the problem, more than 20% of the reported tooth decay goes untreated.

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Experts Advise on Choosing Best Day Care

Child-development professionals at the University of Arkansas say good day care requires high-quality health, safety, learning and relationships. Sue Martin of the University of Arkansas Infant Development Center and Nursery School say parents should look for a child-care facility that is licensed by the state with staff that shows care and respect for children. Some states offer other ways for child-care centers to show quality above and beyond licensure, such as the Arkansas Child Care Approval System. Two kinds of national accreditation are also available, from either the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the National Association for Family Child Care. Licensing agencies set limits on the ratio of children to staff. Typically there should be no more than four babies or toddlers for each caregiver and up to eight children aged 3 to 4 years per caregiver, says Martin. "The best indicator of quality care for children is the educational background and training of the providers," Baldwin said. "Ask how long the teachers or caregivers have been with the center. Attachment is so important for young children." Parents should also check for food quality, cleanliness, a balance of restful and more vigorous activities, sensory toys and free play time.

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Four Walks May Be Better Than One

Three or four short, brisk walks throughout the day can be better than a long bout of exercise for those watching their blood pressure. You might think, "I don't have the time to go to the gym or work out for 40 minutes, but I might have the time to do 10 minutes here, 10 minutes here and another 10 minutes here," said Janet P. Wallace of Indiana University. "Four 10-minute walks would be ideal." The study compared the effect of accumulated versus continuous physical activity on pre-hypertension, an elevated blood-pressure level that typically progresses to hypertension or high blood pressure. The study found that both forms of exercise, accumulated and continuous, decreased study participants' blood pressure by the same amount. The effect lasted for around 11 hours in the group who took four 10-minute walks, compared to seven hours for the group that walked continuously for 40 minutes, according to the study published in the Journal of Hypertension.

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Men and Woman See Beauty Differently

Three University of Florida professors say beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but for female magazine readers, it has nothing to do with sex. Professors Robyn Goodman, Jon Morris and John Sutherland say their study gauged college-age women's emotional responses to ads featuring beautiful women from Vogue, Allure and other women's magazines. The hotter the model's attire or look, the more it left the women cold, while the natural, pretty-in-an-everyday-way types, a look the researchers describe as wholesome, had the best response, according to the study. "I think advertisers would say if you show a woman a sexy picture, many of them will want to emulate it, but I think this research shows that's not true," Morris said. The study brings to light a looming disconnect between generally male executives of companies seeking to market their products and the female consumers they're trying so desperately to reach, according to Goodman. "If you look at most of the Fortune 500 companies, who are they run by? Men," Goodman said. "So, you're their advertising agency and you're pitching these ideas to these men. Well, men have a very specific idea of what's beautiful."

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Diabetic Moms Need Strict Sugar Control

Women know they shouldn't drink alcohol or smoke during pregnancy, but it's critical that diabetic moms-to-be to control blood sugar, says a U.S. expert. Dr. Philip Raskin, a diabetes specialist at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, says babies exposed to high levels of blood sugar in the womb run higher risks of birth defects, growing too large for safe delivery or being born prematurely. Their mothers are at higher risk for health problems, according to Raskin. "Out-of-control blood sugar also could cause a pregnant woman's blood pressure to spike. That could lead to premature birth of the baby, or it could cause seizures or a stroke in the woman during labor and delivery." Raskin recommends that pregnant, diabetic women closely control their blood-sugar levels, treat low blood sugar quickly, take medications on time, exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet.

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Don't Forget Fitness While Traveling

The Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource advises people not leave fitness behind while on vacation or on business trips. Travelers should stash bags in airport lockers and walk briskly around the terminal between flights, the Mayo Clinic researchers advise. "On the plane, stretch and walk the aisle once every hour because it helps decrease muscle aches, joint stiffness and swelling and improves blood flow to reduce the risk of developing a blood clot in the legs," the newsletter says. "Stretch in your seat by rotating your neck and shoulders and wiggling your ankles. The air on a plane typically is very dry, so don't forget to stay hydrated." When traveling in a vehicle, stop often to get out and stretch and walk around a rest area. Pump arms to circulate blood flow and pinch shoulder blades together and then relax them, the newsletter advises. Pack a jacket and umbrella so wherever a traveler is a walk is possible.

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Each Cholesterol Point Cut Lowers Risk

Denver firefighters lowered their cholesterol by an average of 15 points in a national challenge among firefighters. The average cholesterol drop of all of the participating firefighters nationwide was 12 points in the Quaker Smart Heart Challenge. "Heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death of both men and women in the United States, and for every point that you lower your cholesterol, you decrease your risk of heart disease by about 1 percent," said Samantha Heller, senior clinical nutritionist at New York University Medical Center.

"That means that the Denver firefighters reduced their risk of heart disease by a sizeable 15 percent." More firefighters die from heart attacks each year than from fighting fires, according to the Firefighter Fatality Retrospective Study by the U.S. Fire Administration.

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Exercise Lowers Blood Pressure 10 Points

Exercise can lower blood pressure by 10 points, which can prevent the onset of high blood pressure or reduce blood-pressure medicine, says a U.S. expert. A special four-page section in the September issue of the Harvard Heart Letter provides information on blood-pressure basics.

The newsletter advises to keep checking blood pressure -- the doctor should check it at every visit, but measuring at home between visits is even better. A diet for better blood pressure emphasizes fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, whole grains, poultry, fish and nuts. For those overweight, losing weight can lower blood pressure. Smoking a cigarette can cause a 20-point spike in systolic blood pressure, and having more than one alcoholic drink a day can contribute to higher blood pressure, says the newsletter.

Too much sodium and too little potassium can boost blood pressure. Aim for less than 1.5 grams of sodium a day and at least 4.7 grams of potassium from fruits and vegetables such as bananas, oranges and potatoes. Chronic lack of sleep can also contribute to high blood pressure.

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People don't notice larger portions

The food industry has slowly enlarged food portions, so people may not notice they are eating more, according to a U.S. certified diabetes educator. "To a large extent, we've allowed the food industry to tell us how much we should consume," says Suzanne Powell, coordinator of the Diabetes Center at Baylor Medical Center in Garland, Texas. "It's been a slow enough process that we just don't realize we're eating more." Appropriate numbers of servings vary by activity level, age and weight, but most adults should eat five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables, equal to about 1 cup salad greens or cut-up veggies, or a baseball-size orange; 6 servings -- at least half from whole grains -- equal to 1 cup cereal or 1/2 cup cooked pasta; two servings of lean meats and alternatives equal to 3 oz. chicken or fish or 2 Tbsp. peanut butter; and 2 to 3 servings equal to 8 oz. milk or 1 oz. cheese. Powell also suggests that if a restaurant's entrees are large, choose a side dish or appetizer as a main course.

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