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Newsletter

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Salute to Chiropractic

One of the largest groups to utilize alternative therapies is veterans. A recent mail survey evaluated selected alternative medicine use among 264 veterans. The survey included questions on demographics, health beliefs, medical problems and use of six common alternative therapies (chiropractic, herbs, dietary supplements, massage therapy, acupuncture and homeopathy).

Seventy-two patients (27.3%) reported alternative therapy use within the past 12 months. One-fourth of patients (26%) used chiropractic care to alleviate their pain. Back pain was the most frequently reported medical problem (62.5%). While most veterans (76.9%) had used prescription pills to treat their medical problems, 67% of veterans who had not used alternative therapies reported that they would use it if offered by the Veterans Administration (VA).

Currently, chiropractic care is provided at a number of VA hospitals across the country -- but many other VA facilities and veterans are still out there. If you are a veteran, talk to your local VA about providing chiropractic care and other alternative treatments.

You can also contact your state legislator(s) and ask them to support House Resolution 5202, which mandates chiropractic at every VA medical center by the year 2010. To learn more about H.R.5202, visit Chiropractic in the Military.

McEachrane-Gross FP, Liebschutz JM, Berlowitz D. Use of selected complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) treatments in veterans with cancer or chronic pain: a cross-sectional survey. BMC Complementary

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Ads of Ultra-Thin Send Wrong Message

Glamorizing thin teen girls wearing makeup and posing suggestively in ads promotes unhealthy bodies and unhealthy attitudes, says a U.S. expert. "The age of diagnosis for several types of eating disorders has gotten younger, as I'm now treating girls ages 7 to 9, versus 13 to 14 years old being the youngest diagnosis several years ago," says Dr. Stephanie Setliff, a University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center psychologist who specializes in eating disorders.

"Messages being sent to girls and young teens by the media and popularized by ultra-thin movie stars and models contribute to the pressure these girls feel to be perfect." However, genetic and biological components also factor into the situation, as well as these children's personality characteristics and temperament, and how they and their families resolve conflicts in their lives, according to Setliff. Setliff suggests that parents be alert to any indication that their child may be developing an eating disorder. Signs may include an obsession with food and/or exercise; wearing clothing that disguises the body; spending less time with friends; frequent trips to the bathroom -- especially after meals; dieting; and changes in sleep patterns.

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Unbelted Backseat Passengers Can Be Deadly

Unbelted backseat passengers risk injury or death to themselves and the driver seated in front of them in the event of a head-on crash, said a U.S. study. University of Buffalo researchers say that automobile sled tests simulating head-on crashes between two vehicles and using crash-test dummies have demonstrated the likelihood of severe head and chest traumas for driver and passenger caused by an unbelted passenger slamming into the seat of a belted driver.

The risk of severe injury was not evident during sled tests involving driver and passenger dummies restrained by seat belts, according to the researchers. A driver's side airbag was used in all tests. "The tests show clearly that unrestrained rear-seat passengers place themselves, as well as their driver, at great risk of serious injury when involved in a head-on crash," says lead researcher James Mayrose of the University at Buffalo School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. "It doesn't matter if it's an adult-sized person seated behind you, a small child, or even if you have packages or luggage placed in the seat behind you, if they are not belted or safely secured, they can inflict fatal injuries to a driver." The findings were published in the Journal of Trauma.

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Exercise Can Trigger New Brain Neurons

Scientists believed older brains could not reverse brain shrinkage, but a U.S. study finds brisk walking can increase production of new brain neurons. Three hours of brisk walking per day can trigger biochemical changes that increase production of new brain neurons, according to researchers at University of Illinois. Another study shows that a structured exercise program may boost the physical well-being of sedentary seniors who are at risk of losing independent functioning, according to the Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders pilot study. The findings are published in *The Journal of Gerontology: Medical Sciences*.

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Myths About Drinking Persist

Many are aware of the increase in alcohol-related US traffic fatalities on New Year's Eve, but myths about drinking and driving persist. The report of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism says that how alcohol affects the brain and body provide important information that challenges many commonly held, but incorrect beliefs.

Myth: You can drive as long as you are not slurring words or acting erratically.

Fact: The skills and coordination needed for driving are compromised long before the obvious signs of intoxication are visible. In addition, the sedative effects of alcohol, combined with late-night hours, place you at much greater risk of nodding off or losing attention behind the wheel.

Myth: Caffeine will sober you up.

Fact: Caffeine may help with drowsiness, but it doesn't counteract the effect of alcohol on decision-making or coordination. There are no quick cures -- only time will help. Many New Year's revelers get into trouble because they generally do not recognize that critical driving-related skills and decision-making abilities are diminished long before they begin to show the obvious physical signs of intoxication, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Survey: Most Aware of Designated Drivers

More than 148 million U.S. adults have been a designated driver or have been driven home by one, and 92 percent have heard of the practice. Sixty-five percent of Americans believe being the designated driver is the best way to win points with the boss at the annual holiday party, while only 7 percent said singing a favorite holiday song would impress the boss, according to a survey of 1,000 U.S. adults. The survey, conducted by Data Development Worldwide, also found that 71 percent of Americans say their employer uses at least one of four ways to assure employees get home safely from holiday office parties: encouraging the use of designated drivers, offering plenty of food, serving alcohol responsibly or offering free safe rides home. Seventy-eight percent of Americans would overwhelmingly prefer their designated driver to be a friend, compared to 14 percent who would rather take a taxi or 4 percent who would prefer mass transit.

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Noisy Toys Can Damage Children's Hearing

From toy guns to musical instruments to talking dolls, many toys are loud enough to cause permanent hearing damage, says a University of Michigan expert. "With the holidays approaching, parents need to be concerned and selective regarding the toys they purchase, in particular toys that produce some kind of a sound," says Paul R. Kileny, director of audiology and electrophysiology at the University of Michigan Health System's Department of Otolaryngology. "These can be toys that are fairly high tech, or some very low-tech toys, such as whistles and accordions." Kileny notes that children's hearing is particularly sensitive. While the inner ear is completely developed at birth and has the complete complement of hair cells, the ear canal is much smaller, and sounds entering the ear canal become louder because they develop in a smaller space, according to Kileny. There can be as much as a 20-decibel difference between adult and infant ears; thus, infant ears can be damaged more easily than adults' hearing. In addition, children tend to hold toys or games closer to their ears because of the short reach of their arms. Dolls and stuffed animals are often held directly up to the ear region, says Kileny.

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Why Teens Do Risky, Stupid Things

Teens take on risks not because they don't weigh the downside but because they decide the benefits outweigh the risks, says a U.S. study. Researchers say teens are more likely to ponder the risks, they take longer to weigh the pros and cons of engaging in high-risk behavior than adults -- and that they actually overestimate the risks. However, they often decide the benefits -- the immediate gratification or peer acceptance -- outweigh the risks, according to Valerie F. Reyna, professor of human development at Cornell University, and Frank Farley of Temple University. The researchers found that while adults scarcely think about engaging in many high-risk behaviors because they intuitively grasp the risks, adolescents take the time to mull over the risks and benefits. "In other words, more experienced decision-makers tend to rely more on fuzzy reasoning, processing situations and problems rather than weighing multiple factors," said Reyna. The findings are published in the journal *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*.

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Video Games More Than Just Fun to Play

Psychologists at the University of Rochester say people enjoy video games because they find them intrinsically satisfying. “We think there’s a deeper theory than the fun of playing,” says study leader Richard M. Ryan, who worked in collaboration with Immersyve Inc., a virtual environment think tank. “It’s our contention that the psychological ‘pull’ of games is largely due to their capacity to engender feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness.” Players reported feeling best when the games produced positive experiences and challenges that connected to what they know in the real world, according to Ryan. Study volunteers answered pre- and post-game questionnaires. Though different types of games and game environments were studied, Ryan points out that “not all video games are created equal” in their ability to satisfy basic psychological needs. “But those that do may be the best at keeping players coming back,” he says. The findings are published in the journal *Motivation and Emotion*.

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Teens Weighing Themselves A Lot Not Helpful

Teenage girls who weigh themselves frequently are more likely to binge eat and participate in unhealthy weight-control behaviors, finds a U.S. study. Univ. of Minnesota School of Public Health researchers conducted a study of more than 2,000 adolescents to examine changes in eating patterns and weight status over 5 years. The study found the average weight gain during a five-year period was 2x as high among teenage girls who reported weighing themselves frequently. Self-weighing also predicted increased rates of binge eating, smoking, vomiting and skipping meals. This led researchers to conclude that strategies that focus on behavioral change, rather than weight, may be more helpful for teens. “As a society, so much attention is given to weight and staying within a specific number range to maintain a healthy lifestyle,” said Dianne Neumark-Sztainer. “This study shows that encouraging teens to focus on weight as a number is not helpful, and could be harmful.” The findings are published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

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Ads May Hurt Healthy Eating in Schools

Commercial activity and marketing in schools may discourage a healthy nutrition environment for students, according to a U.S. study.

Commercial activity permitted in schools, such as soft-drink ads, the use of Channel One broadcasts in classrooms, sales incentives from soft-drink bottlers and exclusive beverage contracts may discourage a “nutrition-friendly” environment for students, according to study leader Dr. Claudia Probart of Pennsylvania State University.

The researchers sent surveys to 271 food-service directors at high schools in Pennsylvania and found 66.5 percent of the respondents said soft-drink advertisements were located in at least one spot in their school, with 62 percent at vending machines and 27 percent on school grounds such as athletic fields.

Factors influencing the number of soft-drink ads were soft-drink company incentives from distributors, exclusive beverage contracts with the schools and subscriptions to Channel One, a free 12-minute news broadcast with 2 minutes of advertisements, according to the study published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*.

“The negative association between number of soft-drink advertisement locations and participation in school lunch is a disturbing finding, suggesting these ads compete effectively with school lunches, which are designed for good nutrition,” Probart noted.

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Breastfeeding Guards Against Ear Infections

Breastfeeding protects children otherwise made susceptible to ear infections by abnormalities in specific human genes, say U.S. researchers. Researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston say about 19 percent of children are prone to chronic and recurrent ear infections, known to physicians as “otitis media.” These infections can interfere with language development and lead to learning difficulties. The study, published in the journal *Pediatrics*, examined genetic samples taken from 505 children in Texas and Kentucky, about 60 percent of whom were classified as “otitis media susceptible” because they had suffered an ear infection before the age of 6 months; had undergone three or more episodes of acute otitis media within a six-month period; had four or more episodes within a 12-month period; or had six or more episodes by age 6. The researchers found that breastfeeding neutralized the effect of the infections even in children with a genetic predisposition, according to Janak A. Patel. “Not only that, they were protected from recurrent infections even later in childhood, long after they stopped breastfeeding,” he said.

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Men Must Guard Against Osteoporosis, Too

Men as well as women need to be proactive about limiting loss of bone density as they age, advises a U.S. expert. Osteoporosis is commonly thought of as a women's health problem, but it is increasingly becoming a men's health issue and is more likely to go undiagnosed in men, according to Dr. Khashayar Sakhaee, chief of mineral metabolism at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

Lifestyle modifications such as not smoking, consuming alcohol moderately and exercising regularly are important factors for the prevention of osteoporosis. "Adequate calcium intake also is essential," Dr. Sakhaee says. In general, men ages 30 to 50 should take 1,000 milligrams of calcium daily and 1,200 milligrams after age 50, according to Sakhaee. Vitamin D is also important. In men 50 to 70 years old, 400 to 800 IU of vitamin D may be sufficient, but the daily dose should increase to 1,000 IU after age 70.

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