

Spring health briefs

Colds can lead to sinusitis

Early on, the symptoms of colds and sinusitis are similar, says the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. "But if symptoms are worsening after three to five days, or if they are present for more than 10 days, then sinusitis is the likely culprit," said Dr. Anju Peters, chairman of the academy's rhino-sinusitis committee. Sinusitis occurs when cold or allergy-related inflammation blocks the sinus cavities, preventing mucus from draining and leading to infection. People with allergies are more likely to develop sinusitis, which is most common in cold weather. If untreated, sinusitis can last for months or even years. Typical treatments include antibiotics and decongestants.

Shop smart to trim cost and calories

During the economic downturn, the following tips can help you cut back on spending and unnecessary calories:

Stop buying beverages. An individual can easily spend \$25 on beverages each week – and most of them offer little nutritional benefits. Drink tap water instead. Consider a one-time investment in reusable water bottles and keep them filled and ready to go.

Go generic. Most store-brand and generic products are nearly identical to national brands.

Buy the large-size and portion it yourself. Instead of paying a premium for individual packages of food, buy the largest size available and portion it out yourself. For example, you can save 15 to 20 percent by purchasing 32-ounce containers of yogurt rather than individual 6-ounce cups.

A little inactivity, slight weight gain bad news for heart

A study of American doctors shows that a little inactivity and the addition of just a few pounds raises the risk of heart failure. "What this study shows is that even overweight men who are not obese have an increase in heart failure risk," states the December 2008 edition of *Circulation*. "Even a little amount of physical activity appears to decrease the risk of heart failure." According to the study, men who exercised one to three times a month had an 18 percent reduction in heart failure risk, while those who were active five to seven times a week reduced their risk by 36 percent. "The more you exercise, the more reduction you receive," the report concluded.

Seasonings can boost health for diabetics

Researchers investigating the anti-inflammatory properties of spices have discovered that many of them appear to inhibit glycation, which has been linked to inflammation and tissue damage in diabetics. University of Georgia associate professor and study co-author James Hargrove said the spices that seem to offer the biggest benefit to diabetics include cloves, cinnamon, allspice, apple pie spice and pumpkin pie spice. "One can put a lot of antioxidant power into meals by using spices," he said. Plus, the spices won't cause weight gain.

MRIs and med patches don't mix!

The Food and Drug Administration recently issued an advisory to tell your doctor about any medication patches you use, even if they appear clear. More than a quarter of the 60 different drug patches sold contain traces of aluminum or other metals in their backing (the part that makes them stick to your skin), said FDA Deputy Drug Director Dr. Sandra Kweder. Wearing one of them during an MRI can cause a burn similar to bad sunburn. The FDA recommends telling your physician about any medication patches you wear before you get scanned.

Chicken soup: not just for colds

Along with its ability to fight colds, chicken soup also may help lower high blood pressure, reports the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*. The collagen proteins found in chicken act like blood pressure inhibitors known as ACE inhibitors. But researchers warn that adding other ingredients, like salt, could offset or even reverse the benefits.

Good night's sleep is good medicine

Stanford University research has revealed that the immune system fights invading bacteria the hardest at night and the least during the day. "These results suggest that immunity is stronger at night, consistent with the hypothesis that circadian proteins upregulate restorative functions such as specific immune responses during sleep, when (bodies) are not engaged in metabolically costly activities," said Stanford researcher Mimi Shrasu-Hiza in a news release.

Hands-on solution to pain

Naprapathy, a little-known alternative therapy, helps with connective-tissue pain such as tennis elbow, back pain and headaches, according to a study recently published in *The Clinical Journal of Pain*. "Naprapathy is a gentle system of manipulation that can relieve the pinching of areas causing restriction to nerves," said Dr. Paul Maguire, president of the National College of Naprapathic Medicine in Chicago. "It's noninvasive, so there's no downside to it, and it's a feel-good type of treatment that gets results." The treatment isn't new, he added, pointing out that his school is a century old. Naprapathy includes nutritional counseling and therapeutic modalities such as heat, ultrasound or cold laser therapy as well as manipulation of ligaments, tendons and muscle. Sciatica, shoulder pain, neck pain, knee strain and carpal tunnel syndrome also show improvement following naprapathy, the study stated.

Wash up, ladies

New data shows that women lead men in bacteria – hands down. "The sheer number of bacteria species detected on the hands of the study participants was a big surprise, and so was the greater diversity of bacteria we found on the hands of women," said lead researcher Noah Fierer, an assistant professor in the University of Colorado's department of ecology and evolutionary biology. Researchers were not sure why women host a greater variety of bacteria than men, but suggested the acidity of women's skin could be responsible. Other possibilities are differences in sweat and oil gland production between men and women, the frequency of moisturizer or cosmetics application, skin thickness or hormone production. Researchers stressed the importance of hand washing, although they acknowledged that the vast majority of bacteria on the human body are not pathogens.

Alcohol impairment hits older adults harder

Small amounts of alcohol affect older adults more than younger adults, concludes University of Kentucky research published in the March edition of *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. "Older adults thought they were fine when they weren't," said lead researcher Sara Jo Nixon. "You really can't rely on asking, 'Are you alright to drive,' even with lower amounts of alcohol. This may be particularly true for older adults." Researchers found that a relatively small amount of alcohol – two or three drinks – impaired attention and performance in older adults, who were also less able to perceive deficits than younger individuals.