

MANAGED CARE EMPLOYEE WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

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Seven Heart-Smart Ways to Soothe Your Body & Mind

Are you caught up in modern life with its mix of crazy work deadlines, family needs, and household responsibilities--perhaps with a car repair problem or a broken refrigerator tossed in just to keep things interesting? You had best be careful: Medical researchers have now discovered a link between periods of severe stress and increased cholesterol levels.

That's right: Your manic Mondays, traumatic Tuesdays, and wound-up Wednesdays might be boosting the levels of tiny fat particles in your bloodstream. That's because during stressful times, chemical messengers are released that prepare your body for the fight-or-flight response. These hormonal changes can raise your total cholesterol.

But that's not all. Stress can have a powerful, indirect effect on your cholesterol too. If you overeat, smoke, or turn into a couch potato in response to high anxiety, you're giving in to unhealthy lifestyle habits that can raise levels of bad-guy LDLs and erode levels of good-guy HDLs. Gaining excessive weight, eating a diet high in saturated fats, smoking cigarettes, and avoiding exercise can all deep-six healthy cholesterol.

Heart-Smart Stress Soothers

Complement your overall cholesterol-lowering plan by learning to manage your hectic lifestyle.

Where to start:

Just Say "No" Make it a priority to manage your time and emotions. To free up time for the activities that really matter to you, turn down burdensome requests. You don't have to bake a cake for the PTA bake sale. Buy one instead, or--even better--buy cut-up fruit!

Make Exercise Convenient If you don't like it, you probably won't stick with it. Pick an exercise you enjoy and fits your schedule--a brisk walk at lunch, a half-hour on the treadmill while watching the morning or evening news, a yoga class. It's up to you.

Take 10 Set aside 10 minutes a day to close your eyes and focus gently on your breathing. For more training in basic meditation for stress reduction, find a local mindfulness-based stress reduction class. Many hospitals and community centers offer them.

Think before You Snack Are you really hungry? Or are you angry, lonely, tired, or frazzled? Before you give in to emotional eating, try these strategies: Wait a few minutes, try a piece of fruit first, take a short walk, call a friend, or--if you're up late at night stressing over your crazy life--just go to bed.

Pamper Yourself Get a massage, go for a swim--whatever relaxes your body.

-Taken from Prevention Magazine

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2008 – NATIONAL WEAR RED DAY

The Heart Truth—a national awareness campaign for women about heart disease—created and introduced the Red Dress as the national symbol for women and heart disease awareness in 2002 to deliver an urgent wakeup call to American women.



National Wear Red Day—February 1, 2008— is a day when Americans nationwide will wear red to show their support for women's heart disease awareness. This observance promotes the Red Dress symbol and provides an opportunity for everyone to unite in this life-saving awareness movement by showing off a favorite red dress, shirt, or tie, or Red Dress Pin.

Did you know the Red Dress is the national symbol for women and heart disease awareness?

-Taken from National Heart Lung and Blood Institute

CELERY

Super food of the Month



Celery has become a common household staple along with carrots, onions and potatoes. Its crunchy texture and distinctive flavor makes it a popular addition to salads and many cooked dishes. Although it is available throughout the year, you will enjoy the best taste and quality of celery during the summer months when it is in season and locally grown varieties can be easily found in the markets.

Celery is an excellent source of vitamin C, a vitamin that helps to support the immune system. Vitamin C-rich foods like celery may help reduce cold symptoms or severity of cold symptoms; over 20 scientific studies have concluded that vitamin C is a cold-fighter. Vitamin C also prevents the free radical damage that triggers the inflammatory cascade, and is therefore also associated with reduced severity of inflammatory conditions, such as asthma, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis.

How to Select and Store

Choose celery that looks crisp and snaps easily when pulled apart. It should be relatively tight and compact and not have stalks that splay out. The leaves should be pale to bright green in color and free from yellow or brown patches. Sometimes celery can have a condition called "blackheart," which is caused by insects. To check for damage, separate the stalks and look for brown or black discoloration. In addition, evaluate the celery to ensure that it does not have a seed stem—the presence of a round stem in the place of the smaller tender stalks that should reside in the center of the celery. Celery with seed stems are often more bitter in flavor.

A few quick serving ideas:

- Add chopped celery to your favorite tuna fish or chicken salad recipe.
- Enjoy the delicious tradition of eating peanut butter on celery stalks.
- Use celery leaves in salads.
- Braise chopped celery, radicchio and onions and serve topped with walnuts and your favorite soft cheese.
- Next time you are making fresh squeezed carrot juice give it a unique taste dimension by adding some celery to it.
- Add celery leaves and sliced celery stalks to soups, stews, casseroles, and healthy stir fries.

Information from whfoods.com

Eyeglasses Upgrade Helps Elderly Battle Depression



Correcting nursing home residents' poor vision not only boosts quality of life, it may lower risks for depression, U.S. researchers report. A team at the University of Alabama at Birmingham studied 78 nursing home residents, 55 and older, who received eyeglasses one week after having an eye exam and 64 residents who received eyeglasses two months after an eye check-up. The residents' vision-related quality-of-life and depressive symptoms were assessed at the start of the study and again two months later.

At the start of the study, both groups had similar medical/demographic characteristics and similar visual acuity and refractive error. After two months, those who received eyeglasses at the start of the study showed improvement in distance and near visual acuity, while those who didn't receive eyeglasses showed no change in visual acuity. Also at two months, residents who received eyeglasses had higher scores for general vision, reading, activities, hobbies, social interaction, and fewer depressive symptoms, said the study, which was published in the November issue of the journal *Archives of Ophthalmology*.

"This study implies that there are significant, short-term quality-of-life and psychological benefits to providing the most basic of eye care services -- namely, spectacle correction -- to older adults residing in nursing homes," the researchers concluded. *Content provided by Health Day*

MEN'S CORNER:

When Sweat is a Symptom



Answer these questions to see if your perspiration is pathological:

"Did the sweating start recently?"

Most people with primary hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating, which is a hassle, but not deadly) first report the problem as children or teens, says John Eisenach, M.D., an exercise-and-sweat expert at the Mayo Clinic college of medicine. But secondary hyperhidrosis, unusual bouts of perspiration caused by an underlying disease, often begins suddenly in adulthood. Time to get thee to an M.D.

"Do you sweat all over?"

A normal sweat pattern is symmetrical. If one hand is wet and the other is completely dry, you could have a neurological problem. Same goes for sweat that pops up in random patches. Find a neurologist who specializes in the neurophysiology of hyperhidrosis.

-Taken from Men's Health Magazine

Reality Check on Dietary Supplements



Dietary supplements are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Unlike foods or prescription drugs, dietary supplements are manufactured and marketed with less government regulation than a Chinese toy. The FDA identifies its responsibility as only “post-market,” meaning that they’ll pull a product off the shelves if a problem comes to their attention. Fortunately, the nonprofit organization United States Pharmacopoeia is taking on the task of verifying that the ingredients listed on supplement labels match what’s inside the bottles. Look for the USP-Verified Dietary Supplement mark.

Supplements won’t compensate for eating poorly.

“A lousy diet with supplements is still a lousy diet,” says Sari Greaves, a registered dietician at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. “No amount of vitamin-popping will ensure good health unless you’re eating a healthy, balanced diet.” Greaves points out that in whole foods, vitamins and minerals interact synergistically to fortify the body. The many benefits of consuming nutrients by eating fruits and vegetables can’t be mimicked by downing isolated vitamins and minerals in pill form.

Multivitamins with mineral are a good “safety net” for recommended daily allowances.

Though supplements can’t replace a good diet, they can help fill nutritional gaps. Says Greaves, “If you look at the statistics, Americans are not eating nearly enough fruits, vegetables or whole grains. That’s why a multivitamin with mineral is recommended. I tell people it’s like a safety net, an insurance policy.”

Some supplemental nutrients have been found to increase risk of dying.

In recent years, antioxidant supplements have been ballyhooed for their potential to ward off disease. However, when researchers reviewed data on people using supplements, they found that treatment with beta carotene, vitamin A, and vitamin E may actually increase mortality. The study appeared in the February 2007 edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association, and was followed up in August by another JAMA article linking selenium supplements with diabetes. The authors noted that 35 percent of the U.S. population takes multivitamin supplements that contain selenium.

Your doctor or dietician will know whether supplements will help or harm you.

“I wouldn’t advise anyone to go shopping for a supplement without first talking to a certified professional who can help determine if they need to take one,” Greaves says. Safety and efficacy are the two concerns on Greaves’ mind. A primary issue is contraindication; that is, certain prescription drugs should not be used in tandem with dietary supplements or their interaction may need to be carefully timed. Another concern is the possibility of exceeding recommended allowances, which can lead to serious health problems. Taken advisedly, however, supplements can be helpful in resolving deficiencies and preventing a variety of conditions. For example, calcium supplements are frequently recommended to people over 50 to reduce bone loss. Fish oil supplements, rich in LDL cholesterol, are good for patients with heart disease. Even people cutting calories to lose weight, Greaves notes, may be wise to recoup lost micronutrients with the help of a supplement. “But you really have to take that extra step to ensure what you’re interested in is safe,” says Greaves.

- taken from MSN

How Healthy is Soy?



Soy is the epitome of health food: Perhaps only yogurt has a stronger reputation as a food that Americans eat primarily “because it’s good for you”.

Touted as being a heart protector, cancer fighter and a safer alternative to hormones during menopause, soy has long been seen as a miracle food.

Yet the soybean has gotten a bit of a bad rap, thanks to studies linking soy’s estrogen-like chemicals with breast cancer. As a result, many women now shun the food and some men believe tofu will make them less manly.

No need to panic. The research linking animal fat to heart disease and cancer are far stronger than those connecting soy to any health problems. So, if you are considering substituting soy for meat or milk, the soybean still shines in comparison, according to Ethan Balk, associate director of the Tufts-New England Medical Center’s Evidence-Based Practice Center, who reviewed the studies in 2005.

But if the question is whether to eat large amounts of soy or take supplements, the answer is far more elusive. Here’s what the latest findings suggest:

Heart: The most solid evidence on soy credits it with reducing levels of “bad” LDL cholesterol. Balk’s review found that eating large amounts of soy foods or taking supplements was linked to a small, but measurable, positive effect. For every 1 percent reduction in LDL levels, there is a corresponding 1 percent reduction in the risk of heart attack or stroke. Additionally, the studies found that the higher a person’s LDL levels, the more soy can help.

However, soy’s impact on cholesterol wasn’t large enough for the American Heart Association, which reversed its position favoring soy supplements, saying that their effects were too small to warrant recommendation. **Bottom Line:** It’s worth a shot.

-Psychology Today

Kid's Fitness Corner

The June 2005 issue of the *Journal of Pediatrics* published a review of over 300 articles concerning physical activity's effect on the health and behavior of school-age kids. The review resulted in a recommendation that children engage in 60 minutes or more a day of moderate to vigorous physical activity to maintain health and weight. Activities, it said, should be fun and varied.

An editorial in that same issue underscored the challenge of getting kids to move that much. It suggested that as a first step medical and public health practitioners recognize how important physical activity is.

Clinicians should urge young patients to move, while communities and schools need to provide safe environments, such as playgrounds, for children.

While professionals can help improve youngsters' health and welfare by taking those steps, parents are kids' primary caretakers and should find ways to keep them active.



An hour a day keeps fat away - With regular physical activity, kids stay fit and trim.

Team Sports Give Girls an Edge

By age 14, girls abandon sports at a rate six times greater than boys. Here's a compelling new reason to keep them in the game: Athletics--long seen as a boot camp for boys headed for business careers--is also crucial for women's success, new research shows.

In an Oppenheimer Funds survey of 401 highly successful American women, 82 percent of those polled played sports in junior high, high school, or college. Team activities, they said, helped them succeed in a competitive work environment.

The proof is in the paycheck: 41 percent of the women surveyed--physicians, lawyers, and CEOs earning \$75,000 or more--described themselves as athletic. Other studies have shown that only 17 percent of women at all earning levels describe themselves this way.

Sports may help women shatter the glass ceiling by teaching them unwritten rules of the business world. "Teams are how corporations are structured. Involvement in athletics is how boys have always learned to be competitive at work," says Donna Lopiano, executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation. According to a University of Virginia study, 80 percent of female leaders in Fortune 500 companies had participated in school sports.

Activity cuts the risk of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, cancer, and bone fractures. Exercise also helps girls build higher confidence, protecting them from a negative body image and the peer pressure that leads to early (and unhealthy) risk taking, studies show.

The message: Get your daughter started now. Girls who don't participate in sports by age 10 have just a 10 percent chance of being active at 25. "There's still a great deal of pressure on girls not to pursue sports and to be popular in other ways," Lopiano says. The good news: More than 2.74 million girls participated in sports in 2001, an all-time high.

Here are some ways to encourage your daughter:

- Take her to a women's sports event**
- Connect her with a coach who will foster her skills**
- Give her equipment and books about her chosen sport**
- Show your support**



Your future CEO could get her start in athletics.

Weight Watchers Recipe of the Month

HEARTY ITALIAN STYLE SOUP

INGREDIENTS:

2 - 14-1/2oz cans beef broth
 2 cups shredded cabbage
 1 - 14-1/2oz can low-sodium tomatoes, undrained and cut up
 2 medium potatoes (unpeeled, if desired), cubed
 1/2 cup chopped carrot
 1/2 cup sliced celery
 1/2 cup chopped onion
 1/4 cup snipped fresh parsley
 1 tsp. dried Italian seasoning, crushed
 1/4 tsp. garlic salt
 1/4 tsp. pepper
 1 - 15 or 19oz can white kidney beans, rinsed and drained
 1-1/2 cups chopped cooked beef or chicken (about 8 ounces)



INSTRUCTIONS:

In a large saucepan or Dutch oven combine beef broth, cabbage, undrained tomatoes, potatoes, carrot, onion, parsley, Italian seasoning, garlic salt, and pepper. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Cover and simmer, about 20 minutes or until vegetables are tender.

Stir in the beans and beef or chicken. Cook and stir for 2 to 3 minutes or until heated through. (If desired, divide hot soup among 6 airtight containers. Store up to 3 days in the refrigerator.)

Yield: 6 serving

3 POINTS per serving

Nutrition information:

Per serving: 203 calories, 4g total fat (1g saturated fat), 34mg cholesterol, 711mg sodium, 28g carbohydrate, 6g fiber, 19g protein.

It's No Stretch: Yoga Heals the Heart



There's nothing, it seems, yoga can't do. Easing back pain and depression, helping cancer patients, and now a growing body of evidence shows that maintaining the meditative poses can keep your arteries supple and heartbeat steady. In a recent Georgia State University study of 19 men and women with chronic heart failure, those who took yoga classes twice a week for two months along with their usual medical care not only improved their fitness levels but also reduced the markers of inflammation that are associated with heart disease. The people who got standard care but no yoga had none of these benefits. Previous research has linked poor flexibility with stiffening of the arteries. For each of the following postures, clear your mind and inhale and exhale slowly and deeply so your belly rises and falls with every breath. Hold each pose for five full breaths. Repeat the sequence two to three times. You can safely do yoga every day. To learn more about this practice and potentially gain many other benefits, try taking a class.

-Taken from Oprah Magazine

YOGA MOVES OF THE MONTH

TREE POSE:



STEP ONE:

START: Shift your weight to your left foot, lift your right knee to the side and place the sole of the foot against your left thigh. Bring your palms together in front of your chest and then slowly raise your arms overhead. Hold, and then switch sides.

EXTENDED TRIANGLE



STEP ONE:

START: With your feet three and a half to four feet apart, raise your arms parallel to the floor and reach them out to the sides, palms down. Turn your left foot in slightly to the right and your right foot out 90 degrees to the right. Keeping your arms extended, bend from the hip and extend your torso to the left directly over your right leg. Try to rest your right hand on the floor inside your right foot, while reaching toward the ceiling with your left hand. Turn your head to gaze up at the left hand. Hold then switch sides.

COBRA



STEP ONE:

START: Lie facedown with your feet together, toes pointed, and your hands on the floor palms down just in front of your shoulders. Lift your chin and gently press into palms, lifting your upper body off the floor and your head up and back as far as comfortably possible and hold. If you feel strain in your back, keep your elbows bent and forearms on the floor.