

## Spring 2000

### **Pet Chews May Cause Illness in People, Agency Warns**



The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is warning consumers about the possible risk from contact with dog chew products made from pork or beef.

According to FDA, dog chew products, including pig ears, beef jerky treats, smoked hooves, and pig skins, may pose a risk of bacterial infection, such as *Salmonella infantis*. In normally healthy people, these infections can cause flu-like symptoms (nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and diarrhea, for example), but in those with weakened immune systems the infection can be more serious—even life-threatening.

FDA is urging pet owners to wash their hands with hot water and soap after coming into contact with these pet chews. Elderly people, young children, and those with weakened immune systems should avoid contact with the treats altogether. FDA is examining the manufacturing processes for products containing pig ears to determine how this product and similar ones can be made safely.

*FDA Consumer, 34(1), January-February 2000.*

### **Don't Mix Herbs and Standard Drugs**

Using prescription drugs and alternative remedies could put you at risk if you don't tell your doctor you're combining these substances, say researchers from George Washington University and the National Institutes of Health. One in every five prescription drug users also takes alternative medicines, setting the stage for potentially serious drug interactions. Little is known about herb-drug, herb-herb, and nutrient-drug interactions. Discuss your medications and herb use with your doctor.

*FDA Consumer, 34(1), January-February 2000.*

### **Aging — Great Expectations**

Alas, life may indeed be too short, but it is on average much longer than it used to be. From 1900 to 1996, life expectancy at birth for women in the U.S. climbed from 48.3 to 79 years, a stunning gain of slightly more than three decades. Life expectancy for men during the same period increased from 46.3 to 73 years, a gain of almost 28 years. More than 30,000 Americans are 100 years old or more.

#### **In This Issue**

**Pet Chews May Cause Illness in People, Agency Warns**

**Don't Mix Herbs and Standard Drugs**

**Aging — Great Expectations**

**A High-Sodium Diet Increases the Risk of Cardiovascular Disease**

**Worrying About Pesticides in Food**

**What Causes Birth Defects?**

**Chocolate Craving is Real**

**Single vs. Multiple Bouts of Walking**

**American Wealth**

Harvard researchers studying people 100 years and older have shown that the very old also tend to be the very healthy. Maybe it isn't so surprising that the fittest would survive the longest, but it underscores the point that long life is a biological reward for past health. "The older you get, the healthier you have been," say researchers who confirm that bad health habits come back to haunt people in the form of disability in old age.

There is no question that odds increasingly favor getting old and indeed, for some, extremely old. The over-85 age group is the fastest growing in the country.

*Harvard Health Letter, 25(2), December 1999.*

## **A High-Sodium Diet Increases the Risk of Cardiovascular Disease**

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A high-sodium diet increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and death in overweight individuals, said a National Institute of Health-funded study conducted by Tulane University researchers. The study found that overweight individuals with a higher consumption of sodium had a 63% higher risk of death from cardiovascular disease than those with the lowest sodium intake.

*Food Chemical News, 41(42), December 6, 1999.*

## **Worrying About Pesticides in Food**

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According to a study conducted by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), "77 percent of people believe that eating foods treated with pesticides increases cancer risk." However, the Institute also reviewed more than 4,500 studies and "found no convincing evidence that eating foods containing trace amounts of chemicals including pesticides and fertilizers changes cancer risk." In contrast, the Institute said that "eating five or more serv-

ings of fruits and vegetables was found to significantly lower the risk for many cancers."

The Institute was not able to find any evidence to support a link between pesticide residues on fruits and vegetables and cancer. The authors of the report said that "maybe 1 percent of cancers are derived from . . . ingesting the wrong substances, whereas 30 to 40 percent of cancers can be avoided or the risk of them can be reduced by eating the right foods." The right foods included at least five servings each day of vegetables and fruit to reduce the risk of cancer.

The Institute contends that cancer is preventable, and it does not seem to be a matter of avoiding this or that potential carcinogen. Preventing cancer has much more to do with making small, positive changes in lifestyles like eating plenty of fruits and vegetables and getting regular exercise. It was estimated that if the only change people made to their diets was to eat five to six servings of fruits and vegetables each day, worldwide cancer rates would drop by 20 percent. AICR further estimates that a larger drop, an estimated 30-40 percent decline in worldwide cancer cases, could result if people made the following simple lifestyle changes: consuming a predominantly plant-based diet, staying physically active, and maintaining a healthy weight.

More information about the links between diet and cancer can be obtained from the Institute's Website (<http://www.aicr.org>).

*American Institute for Cancer Research Press Release; September 21, 1999. Chemically Speaking, October 1999.*

## **What Causes Birth Defects?**

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Birth defects may happen with no apparent cause, may be inherited from parents, or may be caused by factors like infection, exposure to chemicals, drugs or radiation. Sixty-five percent of birth defects are completely unexplained. There is good evidence that some forms of birth defects are decreasing.

## So What are the Known Causes of Birth Defects?

**Radiation** - Every woman and man planning to have children should protect themselves from unnecessary radiation. The most common source of radiation is diagnostic medical and dental x-rays.

**Cats** - Yes, cats. Cats carry a parasite called *Toxoplasma*, which can be transmitted through their feces to pregnant women. The parasite enters through contaminated food or close contact (ex. litter boxes). In a small percent of pregnancies, *Toxoplasma* can infect the mother's placenta and the baby, resulting in birth defects including mental retardation and blindness.

**Viruses** - German measles is one of the very few viruses that can cause serious birth defects. The rubella vaccine is used for prevention.

**Tobacco and Alcohol** - Use during pregnancy may produce premature birth, low birth weight and poor mental development. Avoiding the use of tobacco and alcohol is very important and sometimes taken too much for granted.

**Genetics** - Each person's bloodline contains good and bad genes; first cousin marriages run a risk of a double-dose of lethal or bad genes in the offspring. Down Syndrome is one of the most common chromosome defects. It occurs more often in pregnancies among older women but can occur in any pregnancy for no apparent reason.

## What About Pesticides?

There has been much speculation in the media concerning the possible association between pesticides and birth defects in humans. Unfortunately this speculation has not been backed up by solid scientific evidence. One exception is DBCP (dibromochloropropane), a fumigant that has not been available since the late - 1970's, which caused reproductive problems at high exposure levels, particularly among males who worked in the DBCP manufacturing plants. With time and avoidance, DBCP effects disappeared. Meanwhile, more case/

control studies are needed to detect any evidence of reproductive damage by commonly used pesticides.

## Can Birth Defects Be Prevented?

Exposure to known causes of birth defects obviously should be avoided. The most common factors to be avoided are unnecessary medications, smoking, and excessive amounts of alcohol. Risks for one group of serious birth defects (neural tube abnormalities - spina bifida, anencephaly) can be significantly decreased by taking folic acid before conception and throughout the pregnancy (at least 0.4 mg/day).

*(Agromedicine Program, Medical University of South Carolina) Chemically Speaking, October 1999.*

## Chocolate Craving Is Real



There's something about chocolate that makes it an object of the palate's desire more than any other food. What that something is remains unknown, but researchers believe it is probably a combination of chocolate's nutrients, chemical composition and, of course, its fat and sugar. Whatever the delicious truth, chocolate craving exists, according to a report in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*.

Despite the downside of fat and sugar, the researchers add, the body's craving for chocolate should be acknowledged and may possibly fit into a healthful diet. The investigators came to this conclusion after reviewing studies of the "drug-like" effects of chocolate indulgence. For some people chocolate represents "self-medication." For instance, certain compounds found naturally in chocolate are also produced in the brain; some studies have shown that these compounds are important regulators of mood and may play a role in depression.

From a nutrition standpoint, the researchers report, chocolate's high amount of magnesium may ease the effects of magnesium deficiency, which may con-

tribute to premenstrual syndrome. Along those lines, chocolate's association with some women's monthly cravings may well have a hormonal basis, according to the report. "Chocolate cravings, appear to exist in 40% of females and 15% of males." Studies have shown that women's episodic chocolate cravings tend to be strongest just before menstruation, when levels of the hormone estrogen are moderate and progesterone levels are high. Because progesterone promotes fat storage, high levels of the hormone may trigger fatty-food cravings.

It is chocolate's fat, sugar and overall taste, smell and texture that are "at the heart of the most widely accepted explanation for chocolate cravings," the authors write. Yet fat and sugar do not entirely explain chocolate's unparalleled appeal, since other high fat high sugar foods usually cannot be substituted to fill the chocolate craver's appetite. So it seems that chocolate's sensory rewards, chemical properties and nutrients conspire together to create "chocoholics."

(SOURCE: *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 99:1249-1256, 1999.)

REF: *www.ReutersHealth.com*, October 7, 1999.

## Single vs. Multiple Bouts of Walking

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In this study, sedentary but otherwise healthy people aged 40-66 were randomly assigned to one of the following groups: Control (no walking program), Long Walking (20-40 min.session), Intermediate Walkers (10-15 min sessions) and Short Walkers (5-10 min sessions). Each group completed the same amount of daily walking with Intermediate and Short Walkers walking several sessions per day. Each of the groups had similar improvements in their fitness (as measured by decreased blood lactate levels and heart rate during a graded treadmill walking test).

However, only Long Walkers and Intermediate Walkers showed significant decreases in blood lipid profiles (cholesterol), with the Long Walkers showing the most benefit. The authors suggest that walking 5-15 minutes several times a day may not be as

effective as walking in 20-40 minute sessions.

*Health Education Research*, December 1999, 14(6):803-815. *USC Prevention Research Center Notes* — Feb. 2000



## American Wealth

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The average U.S. family in 1995 had net financial assets of about \$1,000. This is the value of money in the bank, stocks, bonds, and other securities, after subtracting loans, credit card debt and other unsecured debt. This is the finding of a study on the assets and liabilities of U.S. consumers in 1995. The data was collected by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).

An important reason for the low financial assets, according to the researchers, is consumer debt. Ten percent of families have consumer debt of \$20,000 or more, and another ten percent have consumer debt greater than \$12,500. Twenty-seven percent of families have no consumer debt. The median consumer debt for all families is \$3,000, and median total debt is \$8,800.

A majority of Americans in households with incomes of \$35,000 or less believe that they are more likely to accumulate a \$500,000 nest egg by winning a lottery or sweepstakes (40%) than by patient saving and investing of relatively modest sums (30%). One reason for this belief is that most Americans dramatically undervalue the "time value of money" - the extent to which regular savings will accumulate over time.

The table on page 5 illustrates the "time value of money" principle. The table shows that if you begin investing \$2,000 a year from age 25 to age 34 (a total of \$20,000) and that investment earned 9 percent, you would have \$545,344 at retirement (age 65). However, if you wait until 35 to start investing \$2,000 a year to age 65 (total of \$62,000) you would end up with \$352,527 at age 65. The lesson learned is start now - don't wait to invest for retirement. Share this information with those you know, particularly the younger ones.

**Investor A** invests \$2,000 a year for 10 years, beginning at age 25. **Investor B** waits 10 years, then invests \$2,000 a year for 31 years. Compare the total contributions and the total value at retirement of the two investments. This example assumes a 9 percent fixed rate of return, compounded monthly. All interest is left in the account to allow interest to be earned on interest.

<b>Investor A</b>				<b>Investor B</b>			
Age	Years	Contri- bution	Year End Value	Age	Years	Contri- bution	Year End Value
25	1	\$2,000	\$2,188	25	1	\$ -0-	\$ -0-
26	2	2,000	4,580	26	2	-0-	-0-
27	3	2,000	7,198	27	3	-0-	-0-
28	4	2,000	10,061	28	4	-0-	-0-
29	5	2,000	13,192	29	5	-0-	-0-
30	6	2,000	16,617	30	6	-0-	-0-
31	7	2,000	20,363	31	7	-0-	-0-
32	8	2,000	24,461	32	8	-0-	-0-
33	9	2,000	28,944	33	9	-0-	-0-
34	10	2,000	33,846	34	10	-0-	-0-
35	11	-0-	37,021	35	11	2,000	2,188
36	12	-0-	40,494	36	12	2,000	4,580
37	13	-0-	44,293	37	13	2,000	7,198
38	14	-0-	48,448	38	14	2,000	10,061
39	15	-0-	52,992	39	15	2,000	13,192
40	16	-0-	57,963	40	16	2,000	16,617
41	17	-0-	63,401	41	17	2,000	20,363
42	18	-0-	69,348	42	18	2,000	24,461
43	19	-0-	75,854	43	19	2,000	28,944
44	20	-0-	82,969	44	20	2,000	33,846
45	21	-0-	90,752	45	21	2,000	39,209
46	22	-0-	99,265	46	22	2,000	45,075
47	23	-0-	108,577	47	23	2,000	51,490
48	24	-0-	118,763	48	24	2,000	58,508
49	25	-0-	129,903	49	25	2,000	66,184
50	26	-0-	142,089	50	26	2,000	74,580
51	27	-0-	155,418	51	27	2,000	83,764
52	28	-0-	169,997	52	28	2,000	93,809
53	29	-0-	185,944	53	29	2,000	104,797
54	30	-0-	203,387	54	30	2,000	116,815
55	31	-0-	222,466	55	31	2,000	129,961
56	32	-0-	243,335	56	32	2,000	144,340
57	33	-0-	266,162	57	33	2,000	160,068
58	34	-0-	291,129	58	34	2,000	177,271
59	35	-0-	318,439	59	35	2,000	196,088
60	36	-0-	348,311	60	36	2,000	216,670
61	37	-0-	380,985	61	37	2,000	239,182
62	38	-0-	416,724	62	38	2,000	263,807
63	39	-0-	455,816	63	39	2,000	290,741
64	40	-0-	498,574	64	40	2,000	320,202
65	41	-0-	545,344	65	41	2,000	352,427
<b>Value at Retirement</b>			<b>\$545,344</b>	<b>Value at Retirement</b>			<b>\$352,427</b>
<b>Less Total Contribution</b>			<b>(\$20,000)</b>	<b>Less Total Contribution</b>			<b>(\$62,000)</b>
<b>Net Earnings</b>			<b>\$525,344</b>	<b>Net Earnings</b>			<b>\$290,427</b>

Source: *Today's Consumer*, University of California, Cooperative Extension, Riverside, Winter 1999.