Medical News

Different forms of vitamin E linked to positive, negative effects on lungs.

The New York Times (5/29, O’Connor) reports that a study published in the journal Respiratory Research may help explain the conflicting results of research into the health effects of vitamin E. An analysis of data from the National Institutes of Health-sponsored Cardia study found that the gamma tocopherol form of the vitamin, found in “corn, canola and soybean oils, was linked to poor lung function in adults.” In contrast, alpha tocopherol, found in olive and sunflower oils, “seemed to have a beneficial effect on the lungs.” Study author Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine associate professor Dr. Joan Cook-Mills noted that “gamma tocopherol is increasingly common in American food products” and that US asthma rates increased in the last 40 years even as the use of vegetable oils rich in gamma tocopherol rose. Still, she “cautioned that the research is observational.”

Brief bursts of intense exercise may reduce blood glucose.

The Los Angeles Times (6/14, MacVean) reported that according to a study published last month in the journal of the European Association for the Study of Diabetes, “a little intense exercise might be a good plan for people trying to control their blood sugar.” The study included seven obese patients with insulin resistance. Researchers found that “a brief burst of intense exercise is more effective than a moderate daily 30-minute workout at reducing glucose concentrations in people who are insulin resistant.”
Cynicism tied to higher dementia risk.

The CBS News (5/29, Firger) website reports that according to a study published online May 28 in the journal Neurology, “mistrust of other people may put you at a higher risk for dementia.” The study examined “the impact cynicism may have on long-term cognitive health.”

The NBC News (5/29, Fox) website reports that researchers from Finland “studied 622 people aged 65 to 79 for as long as 10 years.” Participants “took a battery of tests, including a well-validated test to show cynicism.” Individuals “who scored high on the cynicism test were more likely to develop dementia later.”

CNN (5/29, Christensen) reports, “Specifically, the kind of cynicism researchers looked at involved doubting the truth of what people say and believing most people are motivated by self-interest rather than by what is best for the community.” CNN also points out, however, that the “study does not prove that having a bad attitude causes bad health outcomes.” In order to do so, “a study would need randomized controlled trials to show that a reduction in cynical attitudes through treatment actually lowered the risk of bad health outcomes.”

HealthDay (5/29, Reinberg) reports that Sam Gandy, MD, PhD, director, Center for Cognitive Health, Mount Sinai Hospital, New York City, “said the new study ‘addresses the issue of whether dementia underlies the development of an outlook characterized by negative, cynical, sometimes paranoid mistrust that can develop in the elderly.’” Nevertheless, Dr. Gandy, who was not involved in the study, cautioned that physicians “should be wary in their interpretation of these attitudes, he said. They ‘should not jump immediately to the diagnosis of dementia,’ he said.” Medscape (5/29, Anderson) and US News & World Report (5/29, Khan) also cover the study.

Diet that promotes healthy gut may improve sense of wellbeing.

The importance of a healthy gut to general health, and explains that diets “high in sugar, fat, and processed food – can cause gas, discomfort, bloating and inflammation” due to the “less-beneficial” bacteria they promote, which may also “emit chemicals that compromise the intestinal lining,” according to Lita Proctor, of the Human Microbiome Project at the National Institutes of Health. Proctor is quoted saying, “This so-called ‘leaky gut’ allows nonnutritive materials to slip into our bodies and affect how we feel.” The bacteria content of the gut may also play a role in obesity as well as diabetes and heart disease. The article suggests incorporating yogurt with Lactobacillus rhamnosus as well as foods rich in “prebiotics” and avoiding fatty foods.

The Art Detective

Art is alive and well in living pictures at the Pageant of the Masters, my favorite night of entertainment. This year’s theme is the Art Detective. Challis Davy, the director intends to tell a story and shed light on “sensational art history.”

The evening revisits the world’s biggest art heist. A Vermeer painting was stolen from the Gardner museum in Boston, Mass. That mystery has never been solved. Maybe you’ll find the answer.

In any event, you will never regret an evening at the Pageant. Priceless.
Delay in filling antiplatelet agent prescription increases risk of death and MI at two years after stenting.

*Forbes* (5/28, Husten) reports on a study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association finding that when patients “delay or fail to fill their prescription for clopidogrel or another antiplatelet agent” following the insertion of a stent, there may be “significant increases in the risk for death and readmission with MI at 2 years”: 18 percent among those with a drug-eluting stent who delayed compared to 8 percent who did not and 22 percent for those with a bare metal stent who delayed compared to 8 percent who did not. In addition, “DES patients who never filled their prescription had a 12-fold increase in the risk for death, while BMS patients had a 5-fold increase.”

*HealthDay* (5/29, Salamon) reports that “30 percent of stent patients neglect to start taking Plavix (clopidogrel) as directed within three days of hospital discharge.”

*MedPage Today* (5/29, Boyles) reports the study was based on registry data from British Columbia from 2004 to 2006.

*Cardiovascular Business* (5/29, Marshall) also reports on the study.

Statins seen as offering risk, but little benefit for those without heart disease.

*TIME* (5/28, Park) reports on questions over the expanded use of statins as recommended last year by the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology for “people with no history of a heart attack or other heart problems, but who had troubling signs that they might in the future.” Now “experts” are said to be warning that the benefits from statins for this population “don’t outweigh the risks,” of side effects including muscle problems, increased risk of diabetes for those with risk factors, and “growing reports from statin users that the medications put them in a fog and contribute to memory loss.” Though the article says that some of these negative reports may not be dispositive, the conclusion is that diet and exercise are of greater benefit than taking statins.

Interesting report. The problem is that we continue to miss those with disease. That is why we do CIMT and Calcium screening. We need to be more vigilant and find those with risk. Of course, if you are “good” and disease free, then we’ll take you off the meds.

More protein in diet may be linked to lower risk of stroke.

In its “Well” blog, the *New York Times* (6/13, Bakalar) reported that, according to a review of studies published in Neurology, “getting more protein in your diet, though not red meat, may reduce your risk for stroke.”
Venlafaxine may help alleviate menopausal symptoms.

The New York Times (5/29, Bakalar) “Well” blog reports that according to a study published online May 26 in JAMA Internal Medicine, “the antidepressant venlafaxine, often used as an alternative” treatment for night sweats and hot flashes associated with menopause, “is equally effective” to estrogen. For the study, researchers randomized “339 perimenopausal and postmenopausal women to one of three treatments: 0.5 milligrams a day of estrogen (in the form of estradiol), 75 milligrams a day of the antidepressant venlafaxine (a generic form of Effexor), or a placebo.”

The Boston Globe (5/29, Kotz) “Daily Dose” blog reports that participants “who took estrogen had 3.9 hot flashes or night sweats a day, compared to 4.4 episodes in the antidepressant group, and 5.5 in the group that took placebos.” Approximately “70 percent of the estrogen users were satisfied with their treatment, compared to 51 percent of the venlafaxine users and 38 percent of the placebo takers.” According to the blog, “this is the first time estrogen therapy and antidepressants have been compared in a head-to-head trial, which was funded by the National Institutes of Health.”

HealthDay (5/29, Preidt) reports that Dr. Nieca Goldberg, director of the Joan H. Tisch Center for Women’s Health, NYU Langone Medical Center, New York City, said, “As expected, the study shows the best relief from estradiol; however venlafaxine, a non-hormonal treatment for hot flashes, was also beneficial.” Dr. Goldberg added, “Although this is a small study, larger studies are worth pursuing.”

Diet, exercise may be best for preventing diabetes in patients at risk for the disease.

Bloomberg News (6/17, Ostrow) reports that research presented at the American Diabetes Association meeting indicates that “diet and exercise remain the best bet for staving off diabetes in patients at risk for the disease.” Researchers found that “study participants who lost weight and increased physical activity had a 27 percent lower rate of developing Type 2 diabetes, compared with 17 percent of those given metformin, a first-line drug to lower blood sugar.” In a press briefing, Judy Fradkin, of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, said, “Diabetes is a disease that really develops across decades.” Fradkin added, “Although rates of diabetes have been increasing dramatically, outcomes for people with and at risk of diabetes have been improving dramatically.” The NIH funded the study.
Studies: Gene mutations keep levels of triglycerides very low for a lifetime.

The New York Times (6/19, Kolata, Subscription Publication) reports that two studies "independently identified mutations in a single gene that protect against heart attacks by keeping levels of triglycerides...very low for a lifetime." The "studies, published in The New England Journal of Medicine and funded by the National Institutes of Health and the European Union."

Bloomberg News (6/19, Gale) reports that "the research identified mutations in the APOC3 gene that decreased heart disease risk in some people by about 40 percent."

The Boston Globe (6/19, Johnson) reports "the findings suggest that scientists should be looking for a way to mimic what the body does in those people with naturally low levels of triglycerides."

MedPage Today (6/19, Neale) reports that in one study, researchers found that people "who carried at least one of four mutations in the gene had a 40% lower likelihood of coronary heart disease (OR 0.60, 95% CI 0.47-0.75)." In the other study, investigators "showed lower risks of ischemic vascular disease (HR 0.59, 95% CI 0.41-0.86) and ischemic heart disease (HR 0.64, 95% CI 0.41-0.99) in carriers." MedPage Today points out that "in both studies...the mutations were associated with significant reductions in plasma triglyceride levels."

HealthDay (6/19, Preidt) also covers the story.

Reducing systolic blood pressure below a certain point may not benefit people with high blood pressure.

The New York Times (6/19, Bakalar) "Well" blog reports that research published online in JAMA Internal Medicine suggests that reducing systolic blood pressure below a certain point may not benefit individuals with hypertension. In the study, researchers found that "cardiac events were more common in people whose blood pressure exceeded 140, and particularly among those with readings over 160." however, "there was no difference in the risk for heart failure, stroke or heart attack between those in the normal range (120 to 140) and those with a level below 120.

Survey: Americans spending more time sleeping, less time working.

The Wall Street Journal (6/19, A6, Morath, Subscription Publication) reports that according to the US Department of Labor’s American Time Use Survey, released yesterday, Americans spent more time sleeping and less time working in 2013, trends that started during the recent recession and seem to have continued, particularly in unemployed or underemployed workers and in those over the age of 65.

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”
Leo Tolstoy

“The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.”
SEinstein