

the healthy swimmer



Traffic May Be Hard on Your Heart, But Laughter Is Still Good Medicine

Do you ever get stressed out threading through traffic just to get to the pool for your workout? Take a deep breath and let it go. According to the Oct. 21, 2005, issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, exposure to traffic can trigger myocardial infarction (heart attack). The German-based study reports that of the 691 subjects who survived at least 24 hours after their heart attack, an association was found between the exposure to traffic (automobile, public transportation and bicycle traffic) and the onset of a myocardial infarction within one hour. The reasons for the association are unknown, but the authors of the study suggest that stress, noise or particulate air pollution could be the trigger.

So if you're faced with the rush-hour blues, turn on some relaxing music, breathe deeply and center your thoughts on how good you'll feel when you arrive at the pool and dive in for a nice, long swim.

On a related note, laughter may be a buffer against heart attacks, according to University of Maryland cardiologists who made a report to the American Heart Association conference in 2000. Among the findings, people with heart disease were 40 percent less likely to see the humor in life's everyday absurdities than were people of the same age with healthy hearts. <<<

>>> For more information on this topic, visit

www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3021

<http://mentalhealth.about.com/library/sci/1100/bl laugh1100.htm>.

Know the Signs of Stroke and Act Quickly

Every so often, you get a great tip on how to improve your swimming stroke. The American Stroke Association has some of its own stroke tips, and the gist of the message is "time lost is brain lost." By knowing the warning signs, you can reduce the risk of suffering severe disability or death. If you recognize any of the following symptoms, call 911 immediately:

- sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- sudden, severe headache with no known cause
- sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes. <<<

>>> To learn more about stroke and its symptoms, visit the American Stroke Association at www.strokeassociation.org.



Americans Turn to Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Thirty-six percent of U.S. adults age 18 and over use some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), according to a study released last year by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. CAM is defined as a group of diverse medical and healthcare systems, practices and products not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine. When prayer specifically for health reasons is included in the definition of CAM, the number of U.S. adults using some form of CAM rises to 62 percent.

The survey, administered to more than 31,000 adults, included questions on 27 types of CAM therapies commonly used in the United States. These included 10 types of provider-based therapies, such as acupuncture and chiropractic, and 17 other therapies that do not require a provider, such as natural products (herbs or botanical products), yoga, massage and special diets.

Among respondents, 55 percent said they were most likely to use CAM because they believed that it would help them when combined with conventional medical treatments, 50 percent thought CAM would be interesting to try, 26 percent said a conventional medical professional suggested they try it and 13 percent used CAM because they felt that conventional medicine was too expensive. <<<



AP Photo/Daniel Hubshizer

Repercussions Continue in Wake of Vioxx Recall

Do you have any unused prescription Vioxx in your medicine cabinet? If so, you should dispose of it. When Merck & Co. Inc. announced a voluntary worldwide withdrawal of Vioxx (rofecoxib) near the end of last year, users of the drug were deeply concerned.

In the ensuing weeks, the Food and Drug Administration urged doctors to limit prescriptions of Celebrex and Bextra, also in the COX-2 inhibitor class of medication, because of similar concerns about increased risk of heart attacks.

Adding to the concern and confusion, the FDA issued another warning about increased heart attack for users of naproxen (the active drug in Aleve), which belongs to a related class of medication.

In the case of Vioxx, Merck made the decision to recall the medication for arthritis and acute pain, based on data collected from a three-year, placebo-controlled clinical trial. The trial, which has been stopped, was designed to evaluate how effectively the drug could prevent the recurrence of colorectal polyps in patients with a history of colorectal adenomas.

Unfortunately, after 18 months, the trial results started to show an increased risk for heart attack and stroke in patients taking Vioxx, compared to those taking placebo.

"We are taking this action because we believe it best serves the interests of patients," said Raymond V. Gilmartin, Merck's chairman, president and CEO. "Although we believe it would have been possible to continue to market Vioxx with labeling that would incorporate these new data, given the availability of alternative therapies, and the questions raised by the data, we concluded that a voluntary withdrawal is the responsible course to take."

The recall has sparked media reports of Vioxx-related deaths and a congressional investigation. That flurry, combined with the warnings issued on the other drugs, has created a great deal of confusion from both patient and doctors about what drug is best used, particularly for painful disabling arthritis.

However, the FDA has taken no specific action on Vioxx, citing Merck's voluntary decision to withdraw the drug. <<<

>>> Visit www.fda.gov/cder/drug/infopage/vioxx/vioxxQA.htm for more information.

Vitamin Supplements: To Pop or Not to Pop Those Daily Helpers?

Ideally, a healthy person should be able to obtain all necessary vitamins from a balanced diet, says Jane Moore, M.D., a Masters swimmer and a family practice physician in Tacoma, Wash. "However, in today's fast-paced world, many of us do not always eat as well as we should," she adds. "A multiple vitamin once a day is good insurance that we are getting all of the vitamins we need."

Moore, a member of the USMS Sports Medicine and Fitness committees, has written an in-depth article on vitamins for the Fitness section of the USMS web site (December 2004 article of the month). Asked to expand on recent news stories pointing to the potential dangers, including death, of taking too much Vitamin E, Moore says more research is probably needed.

"These reports were based on a study reported in *Annals of Internal Medicine*," Moore notes. "That study is felt by many to be flawed. It was not an actual research study, but a compilation of results from 19 other studies. Those studies were done on people who were already seriously ill."

The pros and cons of Vitamin C are also often debated, particularly during cold and flu season. How much Vitamin C is enough? Can you overdose on Vitamin C?

"There is a huge range of recommended doses of Vitamin C," Moore concedes. "Nobel Prize-winning medical researcher Linus Pauling recommended as much as 10,000 grams per day to prevent colds. You cannot overdose on Vitamin C because it is water soluble and not stored in the body," Moore emphasizes. "Excess amounts are lost in the urine." <<<

>>> Get the full story at www.usms.org/fitness/articleofthefitnessmonth.php. Moore's article is part of a growing archive developed under the watchful eye of Fitness Committee Chair Pam Himstreet of Bend, Ore. Launched in May 2002, the online "fitness library" currently contains more than 30 articles by Masters swimmers and members of the USMS Fitness Committee.



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