



# INSIGHTS

MARCH 2011  
ISSUED QUARTERLY

## IN THIS ISSUE...

### The Benefits of Exercise

- We keep learning more about the benefits of healthy living, but sadly the statistics are showing a trend in the wrong direction

### Foods that Fight

- Simple food choices that can turn your health in the right direction

## The Benefits of Exercise...it just can't be stressed enough

Recently RWAM Insurance Administrators organized a health clinic for their staff to participate in. The timing was perfect as I had been wanting to discuss some personal health concerns with a professional.

If a doctor tells a patient to take a couple of pills a day, the patient is likely to accept the advice. Why not? The advice seems reasonable. Many Canadians however, seem to have difficulty accepting another piece of advice that doctors offer: get some regular exercise.

Judging by a Statistics Canada report, the vast majority of Canadians are getting far less exercise than they need. Accelerometer Meters were used to measure physical activity and sedentary behaviour of participants in a survey between 2007 and 2009. The statistics-gathering agency concluded that only 15 percent of us are getting an appropriate amount, which is 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each week. Even that amount doesn't seem very much. It's only a half an hour a day, 5 days a week.

Sadly, the statistics are particularly poor for children. Only seven percent of young people aged five to seventeen are getting the minimum.

How can that be? One would like to think that young people, who aren't burdened by the responsibility of looking after families, homes and vehicles, would be in a perfect position to participate in a variety of physical activities.

Physical activity is one of our cardiovascular health's best allies, as it preserves the endurance of our heart and blood vessels. The more you exercise, the more you help your heart

to supply the oxygen which is vital for our bodies to function properly. The greater the volume of oxygen pumped by each heartbeat, the less tired we feel.

Exercise also increases the production of good cholesterol and stimulates muscular contractions. These contractions, which stimulate a better use of the insulin produced by the



**Making a few lifestyle changes seems a small price to pay for the rich benefits life has to offer.**

pancreas, enable blood sugar to be rapidly eliminated. Physical activity also reduces high blood pressure. When you exercise, your body releases heat. To evacuate the heat, your blood vessels dilate and decontract, and this is terrific for our hearts.

Canadians' lack of regular exercise is not an easy problem to solve. Parents, the private sector, government, schools and the community at large are all partners in this.

While institutions can help, this is one problem that individuals may

solve on their own in their own way. There are countless ways of getting exercise. For some people, an exercise club is the right place. For others, a few pieces of gym equipment in their own home may be ideal. For still others, the nearby sidewalks and parks may provide good opportunities for jogging. In winter, indoor and outdoor skating rinks are wonderful.

Think about this:

... if you are sedentary, your risk of having heart disease or a stroke is twice as high as that of a person who exercises regularly.

...from a cardiovascular health point of view, lack of exercise is as serious a risk factor as high blood pressure.

...according to the World Health Organization, 2.7 million people per year could stay alive if they ate more fruits and vegetables.

...in Canada, eight people out of 10 have at least one of the risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease (tobacco and alcohol consumption, lack of exercise, obesity, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes).

As for me, I was reminded that my cholesterol is higher than it should be, that my waist circumference is larger than it needs to be, that eating more fruits and vegetables would be helpful, and that increasing my physical activity would be a smart thing to do! Making a few lifestyle changes seems a small price to pay for the rich benefits life has to offer - now I just need to put it into action.

Until next time...

Sources: Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada Pro Health Group Inc.

## Foods That Fight Sickness

The Flu may have passed you by this year, but other viruses and bugs remain out there. Nobody plans to get sick. On the contrary, your efforts to avoid it sometimes seem borderline OCD: don't sneeze into your hands, always cook your chicken to exactly 170 degrees, and hose down every germ-carrying preschooler in sight with soap and water. And yet, no matter how many times you gargle with salt before bedtime or coat yourself in antibacterial hand cleanser, now and again the inevitable rumble in your tummy or tickle in your throat hits. Suddenly, you're down for the count. What are you doing wrong? Probably nothing. But you can do a few more things right. Certain foods and drinks have a natural immunity boost; to tap their benefits, just open up and say, "Ahh."

### Tea Off Against Colds

Not just any hot tea, though. Chamomile is the one that will help prevent sickness. In a recent study, researchers found that people who drank five cups of the brew a day for 2 weeks had increased blood levels of plant-based compounds called polyphenols, some of which have been associated with increased antibacterial activity. Levels remained high for 2 weeks after subjects stopped drinking the tea. Bonus: chamomile tea also raised levels of glycine, a mild nerve relaxant and sedative.



### Knock 'em Dead

There's a killer living in all of us. Known as a macrophage and produced deep in your bone marrow, it's a white blood cell that roams the body, picking fights with bacteria, viruses, or any other intruders. But it only works if you help it. These killer cells are activated by beta-glucans, a component of fiber foods. The best source? Oats. So eat your oatmeal - and better yet, steel-cut oats have double the amount found in the rolled, quick-cooking kind.

### Dressing for Success

Eating a salad for lunch is smart. Drowning it in fat-free dressing isn't. A recent study from Iowa State University found that without dietary fat, your body doesn't absorb some of the disease-fighting nutrients in vegetables. Researchers fed a group of people salad for 12 weeks and tested their blood after each meal. Those who topped their salads with fat-free dressing consistently failed to absorb carotenoids, antioxidants that have been linked to improved immunity. Fat is necessary for the carotenoids to reach the absorptive intestinal cells. Choose dressings with healthy fats from olive or nut oils.



### Fight Bugs this Whey

Whey is rich in an amino acid called cysteine, which converts to glutathione in the body. Glutathione is a potent antioxidant that fortifies cells against bacterial or viral infection. For the highest concentration of protein, try something called powdered whey protein isolate, which is more pure - and more expensive - than concentrate. Fortify your morning smoothie with whey protein powder or try another source: yogurt. The clear liquid that forms on top of most cartons of yogurt is pure whey protein - so don't drain it off, just stir it back into the yogurt.



### Tomato Trumps Chicken

To beat back a cold, you slurp chicken noodle soup. To avoid getting sick in the first place, ladle out some tomato. In a study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 10 subjects ate a tomato-rich diet for 3 weeks, followed by a tomato-free diet for 3 more weeks. While subjects were on the tomato diet, their infection-fighting white blood cells sustained 38 percent less damage from free radicals - atoms in the body that damage and destabilize cells - than when they ate no tomato products. Researchers speculate that the lycopene in tomatoes acts as an antioxidant, helping white blood cells resist the damaging effects of free radicals.



### Give Ma Nature a Taste of Her Own Medicine

Butterbur is an herbal supplement that actually helps you fight allergies. Scottish researchers found that patients with grass and pollen allergies who popped 50 mg of the plant extract twice daily had 13 percent better nasal airflow than those who took a placebo. Another study published in the British Medical Journal reported that butterbur treated seasonal allergies nearly as well as the prescription medication Zyrtec. It's effective against all symptoms of allergic rhinitis, including sneezing, itching, and conjunctivitis.

### Wine, then Dine

Drinking wine with your meal, in addition to being good for your heart, may help ward off food poisoning before it happens. Scientists at Oregon State University recently found that wine can put the kibosh on three common food pathogens: E. coli, listeria, and salmonella. In lab studies, the wine's combination of ethanol, organic acids, and low pH appeared to scramble the bugs' genetic material. All wines have some effect, say researchers, but reds are the most potent.



### Feel the Burn

Several animal and laboratory studies have shown that capsaicin - the compound that gives chili peppers their fire - can help stop sickness before it starts. Mice in one study were given a daily dose of capsaicin and had nearly three times more antibody-producing cells after 3 weeks than those given no capsaicin. More antibodies mean fewer colds and infections. Results of other studies suggest that eating food containing hot components such as capsaicin may improve immune status. The point is, it can't hurt. At the very least, a dash or two of hot sauce might help flush out some toxins.

### Change Your Numbers Game

Losing a little extra baggage will not only reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, but also will help shape up your immune system. Researchers at Tufts University asked a group of slightly overweight people to cut 100 to 200 calories from their daily food intake. In addition to weight loss and a drop in cholesterol counts, participants also boosted their immune system response to disease-causing microorganisms. One thing is certain: Cutting 200 calories out of your daily diet is easy. At your next restaurant meal, ditch the baked potato with sour cream and order steamed vegetables instead.



From the Editors of Women's Health, MSN