

James Hubbard's
My Family Doctor[™]
The Magazine That Makes Housecalls[™]

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SPECIAL COLLECTORS EDITION
38 Fascinating
Q&As, p.12

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Fascinating Questions

It's time for our annual quick Q&A roundup! Read, learn, and wow random strangers with your vast knowledge of all kinds of medical stuff. ... Or just pass 'em the mag. Enjoy!

Nutrition and Fitness

Is the five-second rule real?

It doesn't seem to be. A study in the April *Journal of Applied Microbiology* found that salmonella could survive up to 28 days on a dry surface and be transferred "almost immediately on contact." Other less scientific studies have found different results. It likely just depends on what's on your floor (which doesn't have to be visibly dirty to be contaminated).

—Tozzi

Are eggs bad for me?

Nope: They're filling and a great source of protein, vitamins and minerals. Plus, lutein in the yolk likely helps protect you from macular degeneration. In an otherwise low-cholesterol diet, the American Heart Association allows for up to one egg

per day. (One egg contains about 213 milligrams of cholesterol, according to the AHA, which recommends eating no more than 300 milligrams a day.)

—Weisenberger

Why am I hungrier in the morning when I eat breakfast than when I don't?

I haven't been able to find scientific studies on this, but experience tells me that skipping breakfast regularly has confused your natural sense of hunger. (Also, on the days you're not so hungry, ask yourself if you've eaten late or too much the night before.)

Be patient and allow your body to relearn appropriate hunger. It may take several weeks. Meanwhile, eat a nutritious breakfast with some protein and fiber.

—Weisenberger

Can foods affect my memory?

Yes. A lifetime of regular consumption of caffeinated beverages has been shown to stave off age-related memory loss for women but not men. A diet high in fruits, vegetables and fish oil may have the same effect for both men and women. Glucose from carbohydrate-based foods has been shown repeatedly to enhance memory in the short term. This is the basis of recommendations that all kids eat breakfast before going to school.

—Wheeler

What vitamins should I take?

It depends on your age, sex and overall health. A good multivitamin with minerals is a start since most of us don't eat an optimal diet. If you are a woman who still gets her period, the vitamin should contain iron, but otherwise, too much iron can be harmful.

I recommend that everyone get at least 1,000 milligrams of calcium in the diet per day and 400 international units of Vitamin D (800 if you're postmenopausal). Fish oil contains omega-3 fatty acids that protect the heart and can help with mood and inflammation.

Other nutrients would be tailored to specific concerns like family history, arthritis or other medications.
—Gordon

Does exercising for two hours on Saturday give me the same benefits as exercising for four 30-minute spans throughout the week?

Cramming your workout into two hours isn't the most beneficial way to reach your optimum fitness level in terms of your heart, weight loss and muscle building. You can overwork your body and potentially get injured. Some physical activity is better than none and you can still get health benefits through marathon sessions, but having a balanced workout of at least 30 minutes, four to five times a week will provide better benefits.

—Bascharon

Mental Health

How much does my mind have to do with how I feel pain?

A lot! Pain remains a mysterious condition that science hasn't fully explained. In recent research using functional MRI, scientists were able to watch people's brains during painful procedures. They found that the brain reacts very differently to the same painful stimulus, depending on your expectation! So, when you expect pain, you're more likely to feel it, suggesting that it's a good idea to be optimistic about how much something's going to hurt.

—Wheeler

Can I make myself sick by convincing myself I am?

Yes, but it tends to be subtle and more a matter of expectation and mood than deliberation.

Emotions and stressful thoughts can have a profound effect on your physical state. Some patterns of thinking are strongly associated with a higher risk of developing chronic diseases, especially pessimism, hostility and anxiety. Loneliness is, as well. In drug trials, people routinely have bad side effects from a drug they think they're taking, even if they're taking the placebo.

—Wheeler

Can I prevent getting sick by the way I think?

Yes, to a certain extent. Research shows strong links between better long-term health and things like sociability, optimism and a sense of meaning in life. Cultivating positive moods with optimistic thinking has also been linked with better immune function.

—Wheeler

What is music therapy?

In music therapy, people listen to and interact with music for relief from a variety of physical and psychological ailments. In some forms, people also make music.

The field is still being defined in terms of what is actually done and how it helps people, but it seems to involve a shift of attention away from unpleasant things; a change in emotional state (we've all probably experienced feeling happier after hearing a certain piece of music); changes in thinking, learning and memory; and changes in behavior, especially movement (such as in people with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's).

—Wheeler

Does it work?

There's good evidence that music therapy can help people with chronic pain, migraines (especially children) and tinnitus (ringing in the ears). Studies have also shown benefits for children with anxiety; people with strokes, dementia and schizophrenia; and end-of-life care. There's fascinating research on the effects of listening to Mozart. It seems to decrease the number of seizures in people with certain types of epilepsy.

In nervous-system diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, music

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therapy can help relax muscles and change the way a person moves—to a smoother, more regular rhythm. (People have a natural tendency to move with the beat.) This is also helpful with children with behavior problems characterized by erratic or out-of-control body movements.

It's important to explore music therapy with a certified practitioner to be sure you're getting evidence-based treatment.

—Wheeler

Hollywood

On medical shows they talk about "cc.'s," like "10 cc.'s." What does that mean?

Cc. is short for cubic centimeter—the volume inside a cube measuring 1 centimeter along each edge. One cc. is equal to 1 milliliter. A teaspoon holds 5 cc.'s.

—Briggs

How skinny is too skinny? Are those stick-thin actresses healthy?

One way to determine skinniness—or fatness—is by measuring body mass index: weight (in kilograms) divided by the square of height (in meters). For adults, underweight is less than 18.5. In children, normal BMI varies with age.

Many models and actresses are indeed unhealthily underweight. For example, a woman who is 5'10" and weighs 115 pounds has a BMI of 16.5.

—Briggs

I've seen celebrities touting acne products you can mail order. Do they work?

Over-the-counter acne treatment systems, such as Proactiv Solution, contain benzoyl peroxide and salicylic acid—effective ingredients you'll find in a number of acne products. They work together well. Salicylic

acid exfoliates and unplugs the hair follicles, where blackheads and whiteheads start. This also allows other medicine, such as benzoyl peroxide, to work better by making it easier to penetrate acne lesions. Benzoyl peroxide breaks down blackheads and whiteheads, has an anti-inflammatory effect and kills bacteria.

Prescription-strength medications may have the same strength of benzoyl peroxide or stronger. They also tend to combine the benzoyl peroxide with other ingredients such as antibiotics and alpha hydroxy acids.

—Strachan

Is Proactiv better than other medications you can buy over-the-counter?

Proactiv's advantage is that it's a complete system that many people—particularly adults—can better tolerate. It uses a lower percentage of benzoyl peroxide, 2.5 percent, which has been shown to be less irritating but as effective as higher percentages. It also combines something that exfoliates with something anti-inflammatory.

Many over-the-counter acne medicines were designed with teens in mind. They have oilier skin.

—Strachan

What about higher strengths?

Benzoyl peroxide greater than 5 percent can be good for spot treatment but irritating if applied all over the face.

—Strachan

Diseases

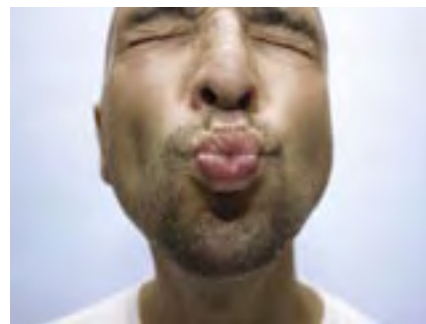
How can a viral infection (like a cold) turn into a bacterial infection (like sinusitis)?

A virus does not become a bacterium but may generate the right environment for bacteria to multiply, leading to secondary infections.

During a viral infection mucus increases, membranes become swol-

len and mucus clearance decreases. This can lead to blockage. Secretions then get trapped and become excellent culture media for bacterial infections to ensue.

—Tozzi



If I have a cold and my husband gets it, can he give it to me again?

Within a few days after you get a cold your immune system begins producing specific antibodies that prevent the virus from infecting more cells. Once you recover, you'll be immune to that specific virus. However, many viruses can cause a common cold, and you could still get infected from a different strain.

—Tozzi

How long do germs stay on surfaces?

Depending on the type of germ and the environmental conditions, they can survive from a few hours up to weeks.

—Tozzi

I heard milk isn't good for someone with asthma. Is this true?

Dairy is one of those foods often restricted because of myth.

Providing nine essential nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D and protein, milk is a nutritional powerhouse. Opposite popular belief, it doesn't increase mucus production or inhibit breathing. Of course, asthmatic people with a true milk-protein allergy should avoid dairy because allergens could trigger asthma symptoms.

—Stokes

What's Your BMI?
Find a link to an easy BMI calculator in your Premium Subscribers Section at the new www.MyFamilyDoctorMag.com.

How does radiation cause cancer?

Most scientists believe radiation causes random mutations of DNA, the genetic material in cells.

At least two years pass between radiation exposure and cancer development. There's no threshold dose, meaning any radiation exposure, miniscule or great, can cause cancer. However, the probability increases with the dose.

—Kornmehl

How does radiation cure cancer?

Therapeutic radiation targets certain areas of the body. Cancer cells, which reproduce more quickly than healthy cells, don't survive as well. The time between daily treatments allows healthy cells to repair themselves in a way cancer cells cannot. Cancer survivors, however, can eventually develop secondary cancers in the targeted areas, albeit rarely.

—Kornmehl

Do doctors and nurses have stronger immune systems than other people? Is that why they don't catch what their patients have?

That's a myth. Hopefully, we just use frequent hand-washing and respiratory etiquette.

During flu seasons, health-care workers are actually considered a relatively high-risk population because they're exposed to people with the flu and can easily pass it on to other patients. They should get vaccinated yearly.

—Tozzi

Is there anything I can do to help prevent arthritis?

The term "arthritis" describes many conditions, including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout.

Osteoarthritis can develop following an injury to the joint, such as the knee in football players. Overweight people are at risk, as well.

Rheumatoid arthritis is mostly a genetic disease, and you can't do

much to prevent it, except perhaps not smoke.

Gout develops from elevated uric acid in the blood. This can result from eating a high-protein diet, as well as excessive intake of alcohol—especially beer. Other factors, including genes, can cause gout, but it's perhaps the type of arthritis that healthful lifestyle modifications can best prevent.

—Gonzalez

The Kids

Is there such a thing as drinking too much milk?

Milk is essential to the toddler diet. But drinking too much may prevent consumption of other necessary nutrients, resulting in deficiencies. The current recommendation is 16 to 24 ounces of milk per day.

—Kassir

Are cough and cold medicines safe for children?

Over the last couple of years, a number of children under 2 have experienced severe side effects from over-the-counter cold medicines. As of press time, the FDA is reviewing their usefulness and safety. In the meantime, they recommend using these medications in small children only under the supervision of a health-care provider.

—Kassir

What about alternating Tylenol and Motrin?

Alternating acetaminophen and ibuprofen is a common practice to try to lower fever. The American Academy of Pediatrics, however, recommends using a single medication to avoid drug interactions, organ toxicity and accidental overdose.

—Kassir

The Teeth

Why brush your teeth twice a day?

Though the American Dental Association recommends brushing twice a day, I contend that there's really no

scientific proof that advocates this. Evidence shows that you only need to break the biofilm (otherwise known as plaque or bacteria) in your mouth once every 24 hours in order to prevent gingivitis or periodontal disease. I would say that brushing twice a day is a precautionary measure in case you don't brush as well as you should (two to three minutes). Of course, people who eat a lot of refined sugars or have other health problems might require more diligent brushing. The best bet is to let your dentist make a proper assessment of your personal risk factors.

—Cruz



Do I need to sanitize my toothbrush?

As long as you're the only person using it, no. But it's best to let your brush dry completely between uses so it doesn't become a bacteria breeding ground.

—Cruz

What are signs I need to go to the dentist?

Typical signs include tooth pain, bleeding gums, sensitivity to hot or cold, sore facial muscles and frequent headaches. But you should also see a dentist if your teeth show signs of accelerated wear such as cracking or chipping.

—Cruz

If I don't have those signs, do I really need to go regularly?

Absolutely. Everybody should get checked for oral cancer once a year. This is also the standard to prevent any kind of oral disease. Research shows that, if left untreated, dental problems can extend beyond your mouth and lead to cardiovascular problems, diabetes and even premature birth in women who are pregnant.

—Cruz

I have sensitive, receding gums. What can I do about them?

Several factors can cause receding gums; therefore, it's always best to see a dentist to find out the cause. Many times, gingivitis or periodontal disease causes sensitivity and receding gums; however, brushing too hard, your bite and inflammation from bacteria can also be factors.

—Cruz

From the ADA

"The American Dental Association recommends visiting your dentist regularly for professional cleanings and oral exams. The ADA does not specify a specific frequency because that can vary and is based upon the oral health needs of the individual patient as determined by the dentist.

"The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a similar recommendation and it follows: The frequency of routine dental visits should be based on individual need—some people will need to see the dentist more often than others. More frequent visits may be necessary for persons at increased risk for oral diseases due to age, pregnancy, tobacco and alcohol use, periodontal diseases, oral hygiene, and health conditions (e.g., diabetes, dry mouth, HIV infection). Your dentist or dental hygienist can help you determine how often you should have your teeth cleaned."

—Fred Peterson, ADA spokesperson, in an e-mail to JHMF

Body Parts

Why can't I use artificial tears with my contacts?

Some solutions contain certain preservatives the lenses might absorb, resulting in a toxic reaction. Others may be too thick and cause blurriness if they build up on the lens. If you have dry eye, there are similar products for lens wearers that are safe to use.

—Sclafani

What causes a crick in your neck?

This pain arises from the complex network of muscles and ligaments that hold your spine in place. It's caused by the cumulative wear and tear of daily life, combined with some small triggering incident—perhaps as minor as a sudden head turn. Like other types of musculoskeletal pain, most cases respond to over-the-counter pain relievers, ice packs and/or warm packs. Neck pain that begins after significant trauma or is accompanied by weakness or numbness is something more serious.

—Briggs

Where does earwax come from?

This waxy substance protects your middle ear's delicate structures from dirt, dust and other foreign substances. Special glands in the skin lining the ear canals secrete earwax, whose texture ranges from soft and liquid to hard and solid.

Normally, earwax forms deep inside the ear canal and moves slowly to the opening, where it flakes and falls off. Sometimes, hard wax accumulates to block the ear canal and a health-care provider must remove it. This may happen due to age or heredity. (Some people just make harder wax than others.)

—Briggs

Women's Health

What causes PMS symptoms, like bloating and bad mood?

Doctors suspect fluctuating hormones

What did we miss?

What questions do you want answered? Ask them all at the new www.MyFamilyDoctorMag.com.

(estrogen and progesterone). Another culprit could be a brain chemical called serotonin, known to play an important role in mood changes.

—Warhus

Besides pain pills, what else can help?

Research shows that a well-balanced diet, regular physical exercise, and rest and relaxation can help. You'll also want to avoid caffeine; alcohol; and excessive salt, fat and sugar. Supplements such as vitamins B-6 and E, calcium, magnesium and a multivitamin may also be beneficial. We know less about herbal products, so check with your health-care provider before taking them.

If necessary, your doctor may prescribe diuretics (water pills) for excessive bloating; birth-control pills to keep your hormones in balance; or, if your symptoms are primarily emotional, an antidepressant.

—Warhus

Is nutrition, exercise and not taking certain medications important before you even know if you're pregnant?

Every sexually active woman should take a supplement with 400 micrograms of folic acid daily. Other than that, in a perfect world, you would maintain a healthy lifestyle and have absolutely no vices or bad habits. Honestly, that is rarely the situation. During your first prenatal visit, it's important to let your doctor know about anything you've done that's concerning you since you may need closer monitoring. Fortunately, the embryo is not usually injured when these mishaps occur. However, for the remainder of your pregnancy, it's essential for baby's growth and development that you maintain healthy lifestyle habits.

—Warhus