

# A to Z Health

**26 ways to look and feel better**

Aging, cholesterol, depression, lack of exercise, oxidants, bad food, good food, and wear and tear—it's a battle out there. And without modern medical research we would be losing big time. Medical research is our weapon against the downhill slide. Without it, we would be hurtling toward oblivion.

Okay, that may sound a little bit negative, but look at the facts. In the last century, the lifespan of the average American has increased to about 76 years, up

from just 49 in 1900, according to Dr. Richard J. Hodes of the National Institute on Aging.

"Why?" you might ask. Because modern medical research has given us the tools necessary to extend our lease on life. The 26 Ways in this special health section are from only some of the hundreds of recent studies and discoveries that can and will improve the quality and length of your life. Whether you are looking for a new method for dealing with acne or a way to curb memory loss, we're sure you will find something useful in this sage medical advice.

## Vitamin A Curbs Acne

There is good news for young women with acne. Several reports on adolescent women with hormonal imbalances and acne caused by the condition show vitamin A supplements cured their blemishes. The data indicates the positive results were reported a few weeks after the women began taking the supplement. After just one week, one patient reported no new instances of acne for the first time in five years. In addition, a vitamin A regimen was effective enough to end the need for conventional medical treatments for the removal of acne scars.

## Slippery Solution to High Blood Pressure

If you want to lower rising blood pressure without medication, try olive oil. In a study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, Italian researchers looked at 23 patients with mild to moderate high blood pressure. The patients were switched to a diet low in saturated fat and high in olive oil. The olive oil reduced the need for medication in some patients, while eight others were able to stop taking anti-hypertensives altogether. Scientists say the polyphenols contained in olives dilate arteries, lowering blood pressure.

## A Little Exercise Goes a Long Way

A long-term study reveals that short workouts are as effective as long ones. In a study published in the medical journal *Circulation*, doctors at the Harvard School of Public Health studied the exercise habits of 7,300 men for five years. They found that short bursts of exercise—about 15 minutes, four times a day—were just as beneficial for the heart as an hour of activity. What matters is not the exertion, but the number of calories burned. Men who burned off 4,400 calories per week in exercise were 40 percent less likely to develop heart disease than men who burned 1,100 calories.

## The Love of Cocoa

Is there enough cocoa in your diet? Research conducted by the University of California-Davis and the candy company Mars shows that dietary intake of some flavanols found in cocoa improves cardiovascular health. Cocoa flavanols inhibit platelet activity—the mechanism that leads to clotting—for as long as six hours after ingestion. Plus, cocoa flavanols improve endothelial function, the layering of cells lining the inside of blood vessels. Other dietary flavanols include apples, cranberries, purple grapes, red wine, green tea and some chocolates.

## Childhood Diet Linked to Breast Cancer Risk

Young girls who eat a lot of fried foods may have a greater risk of developing breast cancer when they become women. A study by the Harvard Medical School found that women who frequently consumed french fries when they were 3 to 5 years of age had an increased risk of breast cancer. Meanwhile, women who consumed whole milk during those same developing years had a slightly decreased risk for the deadly disease. The increased risk of breast cancer for one additional serving of french fries per week was 27 percent. For each additional glass of whole milk per day, the risk decreased by 10 percent.



## Whole Grain Fiber May Lower Risk for Diabetes

Eating more insoluble fiber could lower insulin sensitivity, the condition that precedes type 2 diabetes. German researchers studied 17 overweight women who spent three days on a diet that included a bread enriched with insoluble fiber, and another three days eating a similar, but low-fiber bread. After a few days on the fiber-rich bread, the women's measure of insulin sensitivity improved.

## Good News for Garlic Lovers

Garlic has long been known to reduce cholesterol levels, and now new research shows it may even reduce the buildup of fatty plaque in arteries. A four-year study by German researchers found that people who took 900 milligrams of garlic powder per day had up to 18 percent less plaque in their arteries than those who took a placebo powder. The study also showed that plaque buildup was much slower in the study participants who took garlic. Why garlic has this effect on artery-clogging plaque is not known, but some researchers speculate that substances in the tasty herb keep blood from sticking to arterial walls where it hardens and becomes a blockage.

## Herbal Supplements and Cosmetic Surgery Don't Mix

If you're taking herbal supplements and plan on having cosmetic surgery, tell your doctor. A UCLA study found that 55 percent of patients who have plastic surgery often use herbal supplements. Among the supplements that have been known to cause complications are chondroitin, which is often used to treat osteoarthritis. Combined with blood thinners, chondroitin can lead to bleeding complications during surgery. Another herbal vitamin listed in the study is echinacea. While it can prevent some infections, it can suppress the immune system, slow healing and trigger other types of infections.

## In Vitro Breakthrough

A new technique known as pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) can help prospective parents remove genes from embryos that could carry deadly diseases. When an embryo multiplies to eight cells, it is taken to a lab for testing. The chromosomes are screened for multiple diseases. Any affected genes are removed. Jim Schwartz, PhD., lab director for Advanced Fertility Care in Scottsdale, Ariz., says PGD marks a major advance in eliminating many diseases. One possible misuse of this procedure is gender selection. But Schwartz says his lab won't help couples choose their child's sex unless a disease is related to gender. With PGD, Schwartz says doctors could one day treat major diseases like cancer, diabetes or heart disease at the embryonic stage.

## That Nervy Vitamin C

The stuff that gives citrus its bite can heal heart disease, prevent cancer, protect your memory and even battle the cold. Now researchers say it can prevent some forms of nerve pain. A study published in the *Journal of Family Practice* found that 500 milligrams of vitamin C daily for 50 days reduced the amount of reflex sympathetic dystrophy, a chronic neurological syndrome, in a population of people with wrist fractures. Doctors speculate that vitamin C's antioxidative properties speed nerve repair. Other vitamins and minerals known to heal nerve problems are zinc and some B vitamins.

## No Job Security Makes Jack a Sick Boy

If you constantly feel insecure about your job, your health is most likely suffering. Besides the mental anguish, feelings of job insecurity can have physical effects. And, believe it or not, getting fired will affect your health less than the fear of losing your job. Researchers at the University of Michigan collected data from more than 1,000 people. The participants were interviewed twice over a three-year period. All were employed and none had ever had lengthy stays on unemployment. Those who felt insecure about their jobs reported a much worse state of overall health. Even more interesting, those who worked in the public sector recorded rates of poor health that were lower than private-sector employees.

## Eat Your Greens, Even Kale

Broccoli sprouts may head bladder cancer. A study done at The Ohio State University found that men who ate two or more half-cup servings of broccoli sprouts were 44 percent less likely to develop bladder cancer than those who ate less than one serving a week. Broccoli sprouts have more glucosinolates. During digestion, these chemicals are transformed into isothiocyanates, which researchers suspect play a role in inhibiting bladder cancer. Researchers believe other veggies, such as cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and kale, may contain similar cancer-fighting chemicals.

## LDL Cholesterol Reduces Risk of Heart Disease

A recent study found that a decrease in low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol as small as 15 percent dramatically lowers the risk of coronary heart disease. Scientists from three universities compared LDL cholesterol levels in more than 12,000 patients. In black patients, a 28 percent reduction in LDL caused an 88 percent decrease in coronary heart disease. Meanwhile, white patients who had a 15 percent LDL reduction saw a 50 percent decrease in heart disease.

## Trouble with Memory?

If you're forgetting to remember, don't skip meals and take plenty of vitamin E. A study conducted by the Indiana University Center for Aging Research found that among people who skip meals, 20 percent have poor memory. And low levels of the antioxidant vitamin E results in "oxidative stress" that interferes with brain function. The solution—eat right and regularly.

## Pacemakers for Obesity?

In the battle against obesity, a kind of stomach pacemaker could prove to be a viable treatment. In a study reported in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology*, 12 healthy volunteers had electrodes placed in their stomachs. Over three consecutive days, a team of scientists recorded the participants' food intake, stomach function and other factors when stimulation was applied or not. Real stimulation was associated with significant reductions in food and maximum water intake. In addition, it delayed stomach emptying during the first 45 minutes after a meal. The researchers say the technique may help people lose weight, but that was not tested in the study.

## Collagen for Prostates

Men are finding that collagen has more than cosmetic uses. Injections of collagen are also beneficial after treatment for prostate problems. Research at the University of Texas Health Science Center found that collagen injected into the urinary muscles can help men with incontinence difficulties caused by treatments for various prostate conditions, including cancer. Most men involved in the study received three to four collagen shots, leading to an average response time of just more than six months.

## Chemo Queasiness Can Be Reduced by Acupuncture

Chemo patients can use acupuncture to reduce the likelihood of queasiness and vomiting 24 hours after treatment, according to studies in which participants also took anti-vomiting medication. Jeanette Ezzo, PhD, of James P. Swyers Enterprises, found that electroacupuncture, in which electrical current is passed through the needle, was the only technique that reduced vomiting directly after chemo. However, the electroacupuncture studies were also the only ones in which new anti-vomiting drugs were not used.

## Red Wine May Fight Periodontal Disease

By now, we have all heard that red wine may help ward off cancer, but new information is indicating that it is also effective against periodontal disease. Periodontitis often causes tooth movement and permanent tooth loss. About 15 percent of adults 21 to 50 and 65 percent of adults older than 50 are affected by this disease. In recent years, the benefits of consuming fresh fruits and yellow-green vegetables and beverages, particularly green tea and red wine, have been reported to reduce human cancer incidence and mortality.