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Heart to Heart Talk

With Philip S. Chua, M.D.

Butter on a burn?

Is it good to put butter on a burn?

No, absolutely not. While we hear a lot of quack advice about applying butter, oil or lard on a burn, the practice is not medically accepted. When one suffers a burn, the best thing to do is to run clean cool water over the burned areas to cool them down. If the area is a large one, emergency medical care is needed. Butter, or similar compound, holds the heat in, which is the opposite of what we want to achieve. Besides, this could cause infection.

Is Omega 3 fish oil bad for diabetics?

No, Omega 3, which are unsaturated fatty acids from fish oil, are not bad for diabetics, according to Edgar H. Tan, M. D., an interventional cardiologist at the Cebu Cardiovascular Center of Cebu Doctors' Hospital. He stated that they are useful in lowering triglycerides among those with hypertriglyceridemia (for a comprehensive "cholesterol" control), but are not for routine use. Since triglycerides are from carbohydrates (sugar), it is not unusual to see high triglyceride level among diabetics, especially among those who are uncontrolled. In this scenario, controlling the blood sugar may be enough in bringing down the level of triglycerides. If the diabetes is controlled and the triglyceride level is still high, then your physician may opt to use some medications to normalize the triglyceride level, depending on the patient's cardiovascular risk factors.

Does calcium protect women against ovarian cancer?

While taking calcium, from dairy products or from pills, is no guarantee that a woman will not develop cancer of the ovary, current medical data suggest that taking enough calcium (1200 mg, plus 400 IU of vitamin D) daily confers some degree of protection against ovarian cancer, which is a deadly disease. Appropriate supplemental calcium is, of course, also essential in the prevention of osteoporosis.

Does an apple a day really keep the doctor away?

This "Old Wives' Tale" has a great scientific merit to it. Medical literature is replete with studies to show that the more fruits and vegetables a (non-diabetic) person eats, the healthier he/she is. Apples, for instance, contain an ingredient called pectin, a form of fiber that lowers blood cholesterol, and this fiber also acts as a "laxative" to keep people "regular." And amazingly, when a person has diarrhea, pectin has the opposite good effect to minimize loose bowel movements. Apple is one of the items in the historically famous BRAT (Banana, Rice, Apple and Tea) diet for diarrhea, introduced to the world more than 50 years ago by the internationally-renowned Pediatrician, Dra. Fe del Mundo, my teacher in the medical school, the founder and director of the Children's Memorial Hospital in Quezon City, Philippines, who, at age 90, is still in active practice today.

Does a chill lead to a cold?

No, not really. A person who is exposed to extremely cold temperature, like during winter in Chicago or Minnesota, or in the North Pole, will not necessarily catch a cold, unless he/she is exposed to the virus (from someone with a cold). The cold weather alone, without the virus, cannot cause a cold, but prolonged exposure to severely cold temperature could lead to pneumonia among those with poor or compromised resistance.

Why do we feel sleepy after a meal?

It is a matter of physiology. After eating, the body knows that the stomach is full and therefore needs more blood to help in the digestion. The brain responds by "ordering" the endocrine and circulatory systems to channel more blood and digestive juices to the stomach and intestines, and a little less blood to the brain. This causes the brain function to be more sluggish, making the individual feel sleepy. The same principle applies to, and supports, the advise that one should not swim, run or do any exercises immediately after eating because less blood goes to the legs also (and leg cramps are more likely to develop), when more blood is "re-routed" to the stomach to aid in the digestive process.

Does crossing your legs cause varicose veins?

No, there is no medical evidence that supports this myth. Varicose veins are more genetic that anything else. Some people are born with the hereditary predisposition to develop varicose veins. Other factors also contribute to trigger or aggravate the situation, like pregnancy, obesity, prolonged standing or sitting. All these conditions cause blood to pool in the legs, "hyper" filling the leg veins, making them engorge with blood, resulting in the classic appearance of varicose veins, with the attendant aches and pains. Strategy to remedy and minimize engorgement of the veins includes elevation of the feet as often as possible to help the blood flow back to the lungs more efficiently, use of support stockings, drinking enough (6-8 glasses a day) water, daily exercise and weight control. Depending on various medical factors, physicians may even prescribe blood thinner or aspirin to prevent blood clots in the varicose veins.

Is chicken soup really good for colds?

Our mothers have always said so, and once again, they have been proven to be right. A pulmonologist (lung specialist) discovered in 1978 that sipping hot chicken soup relieved nasal congestion, clearing the air passages, better than drinking hot or cold water. Fifteen years later, researchers confirmed that chicken soup retards the migration of white blood cells that contributes to chest congestion. Also, chicken meat has been shown to contain an amino acid whose molecules are similar to those of an anti-mucus drug.

Can yoga help control high blood pressure?

While we know that aerobic exercises are good for a healthy lifestyle and help control hypertension (high blood pressure), there is no medical evidence that yoga (which is not aerobic) is also as beneficial in lowering blood pressure among hypertensives. Yoga with meditation could calm a person down, soothe the emotion, and provide inner peace. Theoretically, this should help lower the blood pressure, but how effective it really is, compared to aerobic exercises, is still in question. The usual recommendation for control of high blood pressure is aerobic exercises, like walking, abstinence from tobacco, strict moderation in the use of alcohol, weight control, low-salt diet with adequate potassium intake, and regular medical check-up. To this modification in lifestyle, yoga may be added, if desired, since it won't cause any harm and might even help. Personally, I would not have any objection to yoga and meditation for those who are truly interested in them, hypertensive or not, as long as they are healthy enough to do it.

How long can the brain "live" without enough oxygen?

The brain is a very sensitive organ, especially to lack of oxygen. When a person suffers a cardiac and/or respiratory arrest, the oxygen level in the blood goes down to a critical level, because the circulation ceases. When blood stops circulating and therefore does not get to the lungs for oxygenation, the oxygen content is not replenished and falls way down. If this dangerous situation persists for more than three to four minutes, brain death starts. This is why CPR (cardio-respiratory resuscitation) for cardiac and/or respiratory arrest must be done within those critical short minutes, if the attempt to revive the person (and his brain) is to have a chance of success at all.

Does blood in the stool mean cancer?

Not always but the possibility exists, so medical attention is prudent. Blood in the stool is not normal. Bright red blood could mean bleeding from an anal fissure or bleeding from hemorrhoids. Dark blood (tarry stool) could be due to ingestion of iron supplements, food that contains blood in the recipe, or bleeding from a stomach ulcer. Blood in the stools, unless medically proven otherwise, should

always arouse one's suspicion to the probability of cancer of the rectum or colon. The physician, in this situation, will recommend a rectal (finger palpation) exam, and a colonoscopy (a procedure where a long flexible fiberoptic lighted colon "tele" scope with magnified lenses (connected to a TV monitor to display the views inside the colon while the examination is going on) is inserted into the anus and directed to the whole length of the colon to visualize any tumor or abnormalities in the big gut.