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Heart to Heart

With Philip S. Chua, M.D.

Current Health News

Vitamin D Reduces Cancer Risk

Vitamin D lowers the risk of breast, ovarian and colon cancer, according to cancer researchers, following a team review of 63 independent medical studies on the relationship between certain types of cancer and vitamin D between 1966 to 2004, which revealed a clear link. Dr. Cedric Garland of the University of California at San Diego Moores Cancer Center reported the findings in the American Journal of Public Health online edition. "Vitamin D deficiency may account for several thousand premature deaths from breast, colon, ovarian and other cancers each year," concluded the report. Dr. Garland urges governments to fortify foods with vitamin D, like milk and fortified yogurt, cheeses and orange juice. He suggested perhaps "people might want to consider vitamin D supplement to raise their intake to 1000 IUs per day, which is well within the safety guidelines established by the National Academy of Sciences." Consult with your physician before taking vitamin D or any medication to prevent potential side-effects.

Danger of Antibacterial Soaps

Antibacterial soaps, including hand sanitizer liquids, have been capturing the interest of consumers worldwide as the "cleansers of choice." However, studies have shown that this practice could lead to the emergence of super germs that are resistant to antibiotics, and, therefore, "incurable." It also makes the individuals more susceptible to these resistant bacteria. This is like taking oral antibiotics too frequently and unnecessarily, without physician supervision, which could lead to mutation of ordinary bugs that are sensitive to antibiotics into dangerous "super bugs," and severe infections that will not respond to known antibiotics, resulting in septicemia (blood poisoning) and death. Like any other drugs, antibiotics should be used only when prescribed by the attending physician.

Aspirin and Asthma

Asthma patients learn to avoid "triggers" which, by their experience in the past, bring on asthmatic attacks. The trigger could be pollen, pets, cigarette smoke, etc. But one such possible trigger drug is not a well-known culprit, but could bring on an asthmatic attack in some people sensitive to it. Not as "notorious" is the

trusted wonder drug, aspirin. Phillip E. Korenblat, MD, spokesman for the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology, stated that it happens more often than people realize. Aspirin or other pain killers are found to be “triggers” for about one in five asthmatics. It behooves asthma patients to check with their physicians before taking any over-the-counter pain pills or other medications, including the so-called alternative drugs or “natural” drink or food supplements marketed as effective against asthma and against a host of other diseases.

Birth Control Patch

A research scientist reported in a new study that “women using Ortho Evra birth control patch may be twice as likely to develop blood clots as women using birth control pills.” These findings are preliminary and still being analyzed, according to the experts. Another study did not show the patch to have this side effect. Further evaluation aims to resolve the issue of whether the use of the birth control patch actually “boost the risk of clotting” compared to the hormonal oral contraceptives.

Infant Formula Warning

Manufacturer Mead Johnson has recalled a batch of Gentlease powdered infant formula due to metal particles found in a portion of that particular batch. The recall involves their 24-ounce cans with batch code BMJ19 on the bottom of the can. The US-FDA said that the cans have a “use by” date of July 1, 2007. Gentlease is a part of the famous Enfamil family of formulas. No other batches or formulas are subject of this recall. Consumers are advised not to use the recalled formula.

Asthma Drug Deaths

The US-FDA early this month has mandated a warning on the label of two drugs, Advair and Serevent, both manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline, to warn patients that these drugs “may increase the risk of asthma-related death.” This is the strongest warning a drug label could carry. These drugs are prescribed for persons “whose asthma cannot be controlled by steroid-based inhalers alone.”

Abortion Drug Fatalities

Two more deaths from the use of abortion drug RU-486 following a medical abortion were reported to the US Food and Drug Administration by the drug maker, Danco Laboratories.

Antiperspirant and Cancer

A United Kingdom researcher claims that regular use of antiperspirant could increase a woman’s risk of breast cancer. Experts in the United States feel there is still too little evidence to support this claim. However, Philippa Darbe, PhD, cancer

researcher at the University of Reading in England, says “the evidence is mounting that the aluminum-based active ingredient in antiperspirant can mimic estrogen in the body...and lifetime exposure to estrogen increases the risk factor” for these women. While the final word has not been said on this issue, it is prudent for everybody to be cautious.
