

Focus on Health

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Too Much Iron?

Iron levels may be a key to stopping diseases. Men have more iron in their bodies than women, though it is unclear why. Excess levels of iron in the brain contribute to the development of abnormal protein deposits linked to diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Men develop these diseases earlier in life than do women, and higher levels of iron could be partly to blame.

Now, in a new study, iron levels in post-menopausal women who had had hysterectomies before menopause were compared to those who had not. Researchers found that the 15 women who had hysterectomies had higher brain levels of iron (similar to amounts found in men) than the 24 women who did not.

Scientists speculate that brain iron is affected by levels found elsewhere in the body and therefore could be altered, possibly lessening the risk for such diseases. Source: UCLA. Learn more about iron overload.

Walnuts

Researchers from Yale University asked 24 men and women with type-2 diabetes to add about 2 ounces of walnuts to their diet for eight weeks. The subjects' blood vessel tone (endothelial function) was measured with a technique called flow mediated dilation. The walnuts significantly improved the subjects' blood vessel tone, indicating a likely reduction in the overall risk of cardiovascular disease. *Diabetes Care* 2010; 33:227-232.

MRSA

2.5 million Americans carry MRSA (methicillin resistant staph aureus), a deadly antibiotic-resistant strain of bacteria, in their nasal passages – without showing symptoms. People who drink coffee or tea are 50% less vulnerable to the bug, according to a study in the *Annals of Family Medicine*. The protection probably stems from coffee and tea's antimicrobial properties. But be aware that the benefits are found only in hot beverages, not iced.

Good Allergies

The upside of allergies: yes, there is one. People with contact allergies (skin reactions from substances like hair dyes, fragrances, poison ivy, etc.) had lower rates of breast and certain kinds of skin cancer as well as lower rates of brain cancer in a study in the journal *British Medical Journal Open*. While the reason isn't entirely clear, "it may be that individuals with allergies have a more active immune system, and thus are better at destroying cancerous cells," says a senior researcher at the National Research Center in Copenhagen, Denmark. Itchy people, rejoice!

Hepatitis B

A one-time series of three shots at monthly intervals and a booster six months later of hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for all adults born before 1991 when the shots started to be given routinely to all newborn babies.

Prostate Biopsy

A prostate biopsy more than doubles the risk of being hospitalized for infections and other medical problems within the following months, a new study from the Mayo Clinic found.

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