

Focus on Health

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BIRTH CONTROL PILLS

Birth control pills reduce the risk of ovarian cancer by 40% overall. Presumably, the new contraceptive patch (Ortho EVRA) will do the same. The degree of reduction increases with increasing duration of use. The protective effect is maintained for as long as 30 years after discontinuing use. The protective effect is independent of the dose of estrogen in the pill or contraceptive patch, so it must be caused by the progesterone.

M-M-C-S

More and more studies are focusing on preservation of mental function as a reason to use estrogen replacement therapy, especially with estradiol. I categorize it as M-M-C-S, meaning memory, mood, cognition, and sleep. All are favorably affected by normal estradiol blood levels.

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SOY MAY HAVE NEGATIVE CARDIOVASCULAR EFFECTS

Using soy to reduce cardiovascular risk (instead of real estradiol) is not effective and may even be harmful, according to a National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute study. One of the two major phytoestrogens in soy, genistein, showed a strong inverse correlation with coronary vasodilator function. Further studies are needed, but it does raise a red flag.

As part of the professional services I feel should be provided by me to my patients, screening of the voluminous medical literature has become more and more important. Please read this now if you have time before I see you, so that we can further discuss whichever topic especially interests you.

Perhaps you have seen an item that I have not included in this list or have not seen myself. If so, feel free to bring it to my attention.

TRANSFATTY ACIDS AND COLON CANCER

Transfatty acids are the most harmful fats (lipids) in the diet, being at least as harmful as saturated fat. They are largely the result of partial hydrogenation, a process used to make oils more solid, and thus increase shelf life of certain prepared foods. They occur naturally in dairy products, but the main sources are french fries, donuts, cookies, non-dairy creamer, and margarine. Elevated transfatty acids are associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and colon cancer. A study of 4,400 patients shows that postmenopausal women not on estrogen replacement with high transfatty acids double their risk of colon cancer. Those on hormone replacement therapy did not experience an increased risk of colon cancer, regardless of the level of transfatty acids consumed.

CALCIUM SUPPLEMENTS AND HDL CHOLESTEROL

Calcium supplementation not only decreases the risk of osteoporosis, it produces a significant salutary effect on blood lipids, according to a recent study in The American Journal of Medicine. The calcium used was calcium citrate (Citracal). The most substantial effect was a 7% increase in HDL cholesterol.