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8 Surprising Reasons You May Be Gaining Weight

By Lynn Allison

If you've been counting calories and carbs and still not losing weight, researchers say it could be any one of a number of surprising, hidden causes of obesity.

In fact, a recent study by the U.K.-based Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs reports that although we are consuming 14 percent fewer calories than we did in the 1970s, we're getting fatter. One in three Americans is clinically obese, while another third are overweight, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"It's fascinating that we are eating fewer calories and still have this epidemic of obesity," Dr. Carson Liu, a weight-loss expert and bariatric surgeon tells *Health Radar*.

So what's behind the nation's ever-expanding waistline? Experts say it's not just poor dietary choices and lack of exercise. Stress, sleep deprivation, unhealthy lifestyles, and even environmental factors are to blame in many cases.

"We need to take a look at our environment and some of the habits we've developed to take control

of our weight and enjoy healthier lifestyles," Liu says.

Here are eight surprising reasons you may be gaining weight — and what you can do about them.

1. Environmental Pollution

Yes, you can blame the environment for sabotaging your diet and making you pack on the pounds. Pesticides, industrial chemicals, hormones fed to livestock, and other contaminants can all have an impact on metabolism and drive weight gain.

"This largely goes unnoticed," says Dr. Ellen Kamhi, Ph.D., author of "The Natural Nurse."

"Synthetic toxic chemicals sprayed on our food as pesticides are often endocrine disruptors. These toxins are highly fat soluble. After being exposed to these toxins, your body may increase fat stores to protect other body tissues."

She adds that inflammatory molecules increase in number with the presence of toxic chemicals — and increased inflammation leads to weight gain.

Synthetic chemicals used as growth hormones to fatten livestock

and the use of genetically modified organisms (GMO), which allow greater use of agrochemicals, may also be contributing to our inability to lose weight, she says.

Dr. Sharad Paul, author of “The Genetics of Health,” notes researchers at Ohio State University funneled air into mice cages and found that those exposed to polluted air — similar to city air — developed greater volumes of fat than the mice that breathed clean air.

“When fat cells were examined under a microscope, they were 20 percent larger in the mice inhaling pollutants,” he tells *Health Radar*.

What you can do. Buy certified organic foods whenever possible, and avoid using bug sprays or toxic chemicals in your home. Investigate the use of natural alternatives. Read all labels on cosmetics, shampoos, and other household items and choose those that contain natural ingredients. Drink the purest and cleanest water you can find. Spend time in nature as much as possible and lobby for more walking zones where cars are not allowed.

2. Medication

Almost half the American population takes at least one prescription medicine, and a side effect of many drugs is significant weight gain.

“Antidepressants are well-known to cause weight gain,” Dr. Aaron Tabor, a noted weight-loss expert and founder of the Healthy Directions anti-aging website tells *Health Radar*. “It may also be a combination of the antidepressants decreasing metabolism and physical activity, both leading to weight gain.”

Antihistamines are another popular class of drugs that targets a receptor that’s involved with both allergies and appetite. So suppressing that receptor’s activity can make you hungrier and overeat. Beta blockers, diabetes medications, corticosteroids, and antipsychotic drugs may also be culprits.

What you can do. Speak with your healthcare professional about the medications you take and whether they could be driving your weight up. “Don’t quit your medications before you talk to

your doctor, but ask for possible options that won’t have the same side effects,” says Tabor.

3. Sleep Deprivation

It may not be a coincidence that roughly one in three Americans gets less than six hours of shut-eye a night and about the same number are obese. In a recent study of older adults, getting only five hours of sleep instead of the recommended seven to eight tripled obesity risks in men and doubled them in women.

“The more sleep deprived you are, the more you increase the hormone cortisol, which increases your appetite,” says Tabor.

What you can do. Establish a healthy sleep routine and aim for seven to eight hours nightly. Set a schedule in which you go to bed and get up at the same time every day, including weekends. This helps regulate the sleep-wake cycles and other body rhythms, including your appetite.

4. Stress

When we’re stressed, our bodies release hormones into the



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bloodstream that wreak havoc with our metabolism and blood sugar levels, contributing to weight gain, as many studies have shown.

In February, a team of researchers reported in the journal *Obesity* that the more stressed people are, the more heavily and persistently overweight they are likely to be.

But stress has other biological impacts beyond driving hormonal changes, notes weight-loss expert Dr. Joel Fuhrman.

“One critical aspect of stress is the buildup of free radicals and other damaging toxins from overeating — eating too much and too often,” he tells *Health Radar*. “Emotional stress interferes with the body’s self-repair mechanisms that are enhanced when our bodies are resting, at peace, and sleeping. Stress can lead to chronic inflammation, which also causes weight gain.”

What you can do. Eat a more nutritious diet to help detoxify the body and cope with stress. Manage your stress by taking time to eat slowly and without distraction. Practice deep breathing and take breaks when needed from the stressors of your life. Yoga, meditation, and exercise are some tools you can use to reduce stress.

5. Too Much Salty Food

Excess salt can contribute to weight gain in a number of ways. Recent research has shown that a high-sodium diet may affect the activity of fat cells, making them larger.

“You tend to retain fluid when you eat a salty diet,” Amy Shapiro, founder of Real Nutrition NYC, tells *Health Radar*. “Even a sushi dinner can cause weight gain if you overdo the soy sauce.”

But the real culprit is that most foods that are high in salt — like chips, pretzels, fast food, and french fries — are also highly processed and are high in fat and sugar. High-sodium diets can also cause other problems besides obesity, like high blood pressure and ultimately cardiovascular disease, notes Shapiro.

What you can do. Avoid processed foods and eat a healthy diet of fresh fruits and veggies along with whole grains, lean meat, and fish. Try a no-salt seasoning product like Mrs. Dash to flavor your food.

6. High Thermostat

Keeping your house too cozy may sabotage your weight-loss efforts. When temperatures dip, the white fat in our cells turns to brown fat, which burns more calories, say researchers at the University of Kentucky, Lexington.

“Keeping temps too warm prevents our bodies from burning calories,” notes Shapiro. “These days we go from warm cars to warm offices so our bodies don’t really have to work to adjust to temperature changes. Therefore, we burn fewer calories.”

What you can do. By lowering your thermostat, you can boost your body’s metabolic activity. Experts recommend 68 degrees for maximum effect.

7. Excessive Alcohol

It’s not just the empty calories in alcoholic drinks that contribute to weight gain. Research shows that alcohol reduces the amount of fat your body burns for energy.

“Alcohol has no nutritional value and contains 7 calories per

gram,” says Shapiro. “So a 5-ounce glass of wine is 115 calories.”

Alcohol can also cause us to give up a bit of our self-control, so we may take in even more calories at a meal because we are less conscientious about what and how much we are eating.

“Even the mixers used to make fancy cocktails are high in sugar and make an innocent drink turn into a serious dessert,” Shapiro notes.

What you can do. Limit your alcohol consumption and drink it “clean,” without high-calorie mixers, Shapiro advises. If you do want to add a mix with the liquor, choose club soda with fresh lime or lemon.

8. Hidden Viral Infections

A certain strain of cold virus called adenovirus 36 could be a hidden factor in many cases of obesity.

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, discovered that 30 percent of obese people have been infected by this virus, but only 11 percent of thin people have it.

Dr. Richard Atkinson, emeritus professor at the university, speculates that catching the virus can boost weight gain by 12 percent to 15 percent. It appears to flood cells with glucose while turning on an enzyme that converts sugar to fat.

What you can do. Avoid catching the virus the same way you protect yourself against any other virus — by washing your hands frequently, not touching your nose or face when coming into contact with a sick person, boosting your immune system with a healthy diet, and getting enough rest. □



Making **YOU** Live Healthier

with Mehmet Oz, M.D. & Michael Roizen, M.D.

Lifestyle Choices for Cancer Survivors

More than 15.5 million Americans are cancer survivors — including 3.6 million women treated for breast cancer and 1.3 million for gynecological cancers; 3.3 million men treated for prostate cancer; 1.5 million folks treated for colorectal cancer; and another 1.2 million for melanoma.

With advances in detection and treatment, those numbers grow every year. In fact, by 2026, it's projected that the number of cancer survivors will increase by 31 percent, to 20.3 million people.

If you or a loved one is fortunate enough to count yourself in that number, congratulations. Now it's time to make a commitment to staying healthy and cancer-free.

Studies say there are great benefits for longevity and quality of life if cancer survivors adopt good nutrition, regular exercise, and weight management.

Nutrition and Weight Management

It's well-known that being overweight or obese increases the risk for developing various cancers. Research consistently indicates that being overweight or obese also increases the risk of recurrence as well.

As a survivor, a smart first step is to ask your oncologist for a referral to a registered dietitian, preferably one who is also a certified specialist in oncology (CSO). That way, you can establish a dietary plan that will be sure to give you the nutritional support you need to overcome treatment-related side effects and cancer-related changes to your body.

The basic American Cancer Society (ACS) guidelines for a postcancer nutritional regimen are what we advocate for everyone: opt for at least 2 1/2 cups of fruits and vegetables daily (more is better); choose whole grains; enjoy fish and poultry (no red or processed meats); choose mono- and poly-unsaturated fats, such as olive and walnut oil; and skip full-fat dairy.

If you have lost weight and muscle mass during

cancer treatment, work with a nutritionist to determine how to gain back good weight that increases your strength and relieves fatigue without increasing inflammation.

Remember, a calorie is not just a calorie. Stick with the nutritional guidelines mentioned earlier to lower inflammation, promote muscle tone, build strength, and protect your heart and other organs from damage.

For weight loss, go slow and steady by making lifelong changes in your eating and activity habits, not by starving yourself or stressing your body with faddish diet plans. Aim for a 5 percent total body mass loss over three or more months.

Physical Activity

There is solid research showing that physical activity during recovery from cancer treatment helps manage both physical and emotional stresses, and even more studies show the benefits for long-term survival and prevention of recurrence.

According to a study in the ACS journal, *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*, "At least 20 prospective observational studies have shown that physically active [breast, colorectal, prostate and ovarian] cancer survivors have a lower risk of cancer recurrences and improved survival compared with those who are inactive."

Get at least 150 minutes of extra physical activity (walking, aerobics, swimming, yoga, cycling) each week; and include 20 to 30 minutes of strength training twice a week.

Look for a local support group. The Cleveland Clinic Wellness Institute has groups of 12 to 16 people for each type of cancer. Survivors come together for help with stress, physical activity, cooking and shopping, and toxin withdrawal. □

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10 Foods Cancer Experts Say You Should Limit or Avoid Altogether

By Gary Greenberg

When it comes to cancer prevention, one easy way to reduce your risk is to be finicky about what you put in your mouth. Several common and aggressive types of cancer — including colorectal, stomach, breast, brain, and liver — have been linked to certain foods.

“It’s a complicated issue,” says Dr. Joya Chandra, an associate professor and cancer researcher at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. “There are definitive links between obesity and several types of cancer, but links between diet and cancer are less clear.”

Chandra explains that clinical studies connecting specific foods or compounds in foods to cancer are typically done through dietary recall surveys, and it’s difficult to account for all of the variables. In studies performed on lab animals, the physiology is different from people, and correlations such as the amount of a compound given to the animals may not match up to normal human consumption.

“It’s difficult to prove scientifically that specific ingredients are carcinogenic,” Chandra tells *Health Radar*. “But it’s a good idea to follow the government’s dietary guidelines, which means eating primarily fruits and vegetables, small amounts of lean protein, and whole grains.”

Although the science connecting diet and cancer remains unsettled,

here are 10 foods that many experts say to avoid.

1. Grilled meat. The National Cancer Institute warns that grilling meat over an open flame generates chemicals that can damage DNA, raising the risk for cancer. If you do grill, marinating meat and turning it frequently will reduce production of carcinogenic chemicals.

2. Red meat. The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) recommends a weekly intake of 18 ounces or less of cooked red meat. More than that, researchers say, increases the risk of colorectal cancer.

3. Processed meats. Hot dogs, cold cuts, bacon, and other processed meats contain preservatives that can become carcinogenic in the body. Researchers at the AICR note that “any amount of processed meat is linked to increased risk of colorectal cancer.”

4. Alcohol. Booze trails only tobacco as a cancer risk. Scientists at the World Health Organization analyzed 27 studies and concluded that excessive alcohol consumption is a leading cause of liver, colon, mouth, esophageal, rectal and breast cancers. Limit adult beverages to two per day for men and one for women.

5. Microwave popcorn. Both the packaging and contents are hazards of this movie-watching munchie. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) calls the perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) in microwave popcorn bag linings a

“likely” carcinogen. Fumes from artificial butter that’s often used contain the toxin diacetyl, which has been linked to lung cancer.

6. Canned tomatoes. It’s not the tomatoes — it’s the cans. They’re commonly lined with bisphenol A (BPA). “Even miniscule BPA exposure increases risks for breast cancer and prostate cancer,” note experts at the Breast Cancer Fund.

7. Farmed salmon. According to the Environmental Working Group, a consumer advocate, farmed salmon has the highest carcinogenic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) of any food. Eat wild-caught salmon instead.

8. Doughnuts. Made with refined flour, loaded with sugar, and deep-fried in unhealthy oils, these treats are truly a triple threat for cancer. The flour is bleached with toxic chlorine gas, sugar is thought to fuel tumor growth, and boiling oils break down into carcinogenic chemicals.

9. French fries. Cooking a starchy vegetable at high heat produces the chemical compound acrylamide, which researchers at the National Cancer Institute call a “probable human carcinogen.”

10. Non-organic produce. A research arm of the World Health Organization called one of the most popular herbicides, glyphosate, “probably carcinogenic.” Add to that fertilizers and hormones to make produce bigger, and you get a toxic mishmash that is most easily avoided by buying certified organic products. □

Protein Diet: Best Way to Manage Diabetes?

By Chris Pritchard

High-protein foods — particularly for breakfast — have been hailed as an effective way to help manage diabetes, lose weight, and reduce blood sugar spikes. But new research shows that not all protein sources are created equal.

In fact, one food item is much better than the others for managing blood sugar: whey protein powder.

A study led by Dr. Daniela Jakubowicz and her team at Tel Aviv University in Israel found that diabetics who have drinks containing whey powder for breakfast lost more weight over a period of months and had better control of their blood glucose than those who don't.

Jakubowicz tells *Health Radar* that high-protein foods are safe and effective for managing diabetes, beginning with breakfast.

“A high-calorie protein breakfast, medium-sized lunch, and small dinner is a proven successful strategy for weight loss and Type 2 diabetes,” she says.

“[But] whey protein powder — a byproduct of milk during cheese production — induced greater satiety and reduction of glucose spikes after meals than protein sources such as eggs, soy, or tuna.”

For her study, Jakubowicz and her team randomly assigned 48 overweight and obese people with Type 2 diabetes to one of three groups. One group ate high-carbohydrate diets; the second had a high-protein diet, including eggs, tuna, and soy; and the third was

given breakfast shakes made from whey protein powder.

After 12 weeks, the group consuming whey protein shakes lost the most weight (an average of 16.7 pounds), felt most satisfied and less hungry during the day, and had lower after-meal glucose spikes than those in the other two groups. What's more, their HbA1C levels decreased more than for the other two groups.

“The whey protein diet significantly suppresses the hunger hormone ghrelin,” Jakubowicz reports. Ghrelin is a hormone produced by cells lining the stomach and the pancreas.

“A whey protein drink is easily prepared with advantages for weight loss and reduction of hunger, glucose spikes, and HbA1C levels,” she concludes. □

3 Common Diet Mistakes You're Probably Making

By Nick Tate

We tend to associate the word “diet” with weight loss. But research suggests we should instead start thinking of food as medicine that fuels a long and healthy life. That's particularly true if you have a chronic condition like diabetes.

Dr. Chad Larson, naturopathic doctor and certified clinical nutritionist with Cyrex Laboratories, tells *Health Radar* that outmoded views about diet and nutrition still inform many

Americans' eating habits.

“Unfortunately, many look to a quick-fix diet, creating a shock to their bodies,” he says. “[But] we are quickly learning that we must view diet as an individualized, life-long health plan, rather than just a means to lose weight.”

Larson has identified the following habits to avoid:

Eating out often or too many packaged foods. Eating out or on the go can increase your intake of processed, packaged foods that aren't especially healthy. A better option: Make and eat more

home-cooked meals containing more healthy nutrients.

Skipping breakfast. Routinely waiting until lunchtime or later to fuel your body and mind with nutrients can leave you feeling lethargic and more likely to overeat later in the day.

Buying no-no foods. Grocery shopping on an empty stomach can lead you to buy junk foods on impulse. It's best to shop after breakfast, lunch, or dinner when you're more inclined to be sensible about buying healthy, nutritious foods. □

Should You Take Probiotic Supplements?

By Nick Tate

You've no doubt heard about the benefits of probiotics — those good-for-you bacteria and yeasts that have been shown to aid digestion, boost immunity, combat a host of ailments, and improve your overall mental and physical health.

But there's only so much yogurt, sauerkraut, aged cheeses, pickles, and other probiotic-laden foods you can pack into your diet, right? The good news: Taking a probiotic supplement can easily increase your consumption of these healthy microbes.

Robert Newsman — a certified nutritionist, chiropractor, and wellness expert from East Northport, N.Y. — tells *Health Radar* it's important to know what to look for when choosing a supplement.

One key factor: The most effective formulations are refrigerated to keep the live cultures active.

“Generally speaking, the most active formulas are found in the refrigerated section at your health food store,” says Newman. “Always store the container in the refrigerator for increased viability.”

Newman also recommends choosing products that contain high “therapeutic counts” of certain healthy-bacterial strains and colonies.

“I like to look for 5 to 10 strains of *Bifido* and *Lactobacillus* bacterium, and a therapeutic count of 30 to 50 billion,” he explains. “For very severe intestinal dysbiosis I will dose 100 billion to 200 billion. And there's a probiotic yeast called *Saccharomyces boullardii* that has proven most effective for diarrhea.”

Nearly 2 percent of Americans take probiotic supplements, and their use has quadrupled since 2007, according to polling by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Scientific studies have linked probiotics to a wide range of health benefits and fueled public interest. Among the benefits:

Digestive health. Probiotics are a front-line treatment for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), chronic constipation, abdominal pain, gas, bloating, and other gastrointestinal disorders. They're also helpful for maintaining healthy levels of “good” bacteria in the GI tracts of people who are taking broad-

spectrum antibiotics, which kill bacteria of all kinds.

Cancer. University of California, Los Angeles researchers found mice fed healthy, anti-inflammatory gut bacteria produced microbes known to prevent cancer and reduce gene damage. This suggests probiotic supplements may help prevent cancer from developing. A second study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, found that probiotics may help block tumor growth.

Weight loss. A study published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* found probiotics may help women lose weight and keep it off. Overweight women who took two pills daily containing probiotics from the *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* family lost almost twice as much weight as those who did not take the supplements in a three-month period.

Heavy metal poisoning. A study at Lawson Health Research Institute's Canadian Centre for Human Microbiome and Probiotic Research found pregnant women taking probiotics absorbed 78 percent less arsenic and 36 percent less mercury.

Allergies. An analysis of 23 studies at Vanderbilt University Medical Center found probiotics improved the symptoms of people with seasonal allergies, such as sneezing and a stuffy nose, in 17 of the studies. Researchers believe probiotics change the composition of bacteria in the intestines in ways that modulate the body's immune response and stop it from reacting to pollen and other allergens. The study was published in the journal *International Forum of Allergy & Rhinology*.

High blood pressure. Research published in the journal *Hypertension* found that people who took probiotics daily for more than two months experienced an average drop of 3.6 mmHg in systolic blood pressure (the top number), and a 2.4 mmHg drop in diastolic blood pressure (the bottom number).

Depression. A University of Toronto study found that patients suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome who went on a two-month course of probiotics significantly reduced their depression and anxiety. Experts said the healthy bacteria growth encouraged by the probiotics boosted the production of L-tryptophan, a “feel-good” neurotransmitter. □

Rotator Cuff Injuries: Causes and Remedies

By Lynn Allison

Q: What is a rotator cuff injury?

A: The rotator cuff is a network of four muscles that create a tendon that keeps your arm in the shoulder socket. Over time the rotator cuff tendon can degenerate and that combined with heavy use of the arm, may cause injury or tearing of one of the muscles, usually the one on top, called the supraspinatus. Rotator cuff injury is the most common non-traumatic upper limb cause of disability in people over the age of 50. In fact, it's the reason more than 5 million people visit physicians annually. More than 90 percent of rotator cuff tears involve the supraspinatus.

Q: What are the most common causes?

A: The most common cause of injury is the gradual wearing away of the tendon. When we are in our 20s and 30s the amount of force that is required to tear the rotator cuff tendon is significant, usually related to a traumatic event. However, when people age the amount of force to tear the tendon decreases — especially past the age of 60. Some occupations that require heavy overhead lifting, such as iron workers, painters, and other manual labor occupations, have a higher incidence of rotator cuff problems. Baseball players are also at increased risk of rotator cuff injury because of the overhead throwing motion.

Q: What kind of symptoms are there?

A: The symptoms of a rotator cuff injury are related to pain that radiates laterally on the arm, made worse with activity but also painful at rest. Pain is the main reason people seek medical help. If the injury involves more of the tendons, people will also experience decreased range of motion and their shoulder strength will be substantially reduced. This can affect daily living and if three or more tendons are involved, it becomes almost impossible to raise the arm, which interferes with eating, drinking from a cup or getting dressed.

Q: When should you see a doctor and what tests will be performed?

A: If you still have pain and cannot perform daily tasks after two to six weeks despite giving your shoulder a rest, it's time to seek medical advice. Your doctor will take a detailed medical history and perform a physical examination of your shoulder. Clinical tests for each part of the rotator cuff tendon can help an orthopedic surgeon determine what part is injured even prior to taking radiographic images. The evaluation will also include an assessment of the neurological system to ensure that the injury is not related to a nerve injury. With the history and physical examination, the working diagnosis is relatively clear in three out of four patients. Simple radiographs and an MRI can help the physician pinpoint the exact location of the tear and provide valuable information about the surrounding structures.

Q: Is surgery necessary?

A: Most rotator cuff injuries can be treated nonsurgically. The three types of treatment include anti-inflammatory medicine, physical therapy, and corticosteroid injections. If this conservative approach doesn't improve the injury after 12 weeks, surgical management may be considered. If the injury occurred after a specific event and the patient is over 60 with a significant tear of the tendon, surgery may be the most appropriate option. Today, we use arthroscopic techniques to repair the tendon. This method of surgery has dramatically reduced the number of postsurgical complications including infections, deep vein thrombosis, wound healing, and remission rates. □

Dr. Anthony Romeo is a professor in the Division of Sports Medicine, Department of Orthopedic Surgery, at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. He's also the co-team physician of the MLB's Chicago White Sox and the NBA's Chicago Bulls.



FDA Issues Warning on Mercury in Skin Care Products

By Nick Tate

That anti-aging or moisturizing cream you're using might contain some ugly ingredients. That's the upshot of a new warning from the FDA: Some wrinkle products, cosmetics, skin lotions, and antiseptic soaps contain hidden mercury.

Jason Humbert of FDA's Office of Regulatory Affairs says these products are usually marketed as skin lighteners and anti-aging treatments that remove age spots, freckles, blemishes, and wrinkles.

Most are manufactured abroad and sold online or illegally in the United States, often in shops catering to the Latino, Asian, African, or Middle Eastern communities, Humbert said.

It may not be readily apparent

that they contain mercury because the labels can be misleading.

If the ingredients list includes "mercurous chloride," "calomel," "mercuric," "mercurio," the mercury's in it — and you should stop using the product.

If the ingredients aren't listed and there is no product label, that may be a sign that it contains mercury or is an illegal item that may pose a risk. Drugs or cosmetics labeled in languages other than English are often illegally marketed products.

"These products are promoted as cosmetics, but they also may be unapproved new drugs," says Dr. Linda Katz, director of FDA's Office of Cosmetics and Colors.

The FDA does not allow mercury in drugs or cosmetics, except when there are no other safe

and effective preservatives available.

Some people — including pregnant women, nursing babies, and young children — are especially vulnerable to mercury toxicity. The toxin can harm babies' developing brains and nervous systems.

To protect yourself and your loved ones, the FDA advises:

- Check product labels for mercury or other ingredients that indicate they contain the toxin.
- If you have a reaction you suspect may be caused by mercury, thoroughly wash your hands and other parts of your body that have come in contact with it.
- If you have questions about a product, consult a healthcare professional or call the 24-hour Poison Control hotline at 1-800-222-1222. □

5 Ways to Reduce Arthritis Pain Naturally

By Eric Caplan

Millions of Americans take medication to ease arthritis pain and other age-related causes of discomfort. But a handful of nondrug alternatives have also been shown to alleviate and even prevent arthritis pain.

Marcy O'Koon, senior director for consumer health at the Arthritis Foundation, tells *Health Radar* that simply adding more anti-inflammatory foods to your diet can have a big impact on pain.

"The Mediterranean diet

is considered a good model for eating a diet that reduces or at least doesn't promote inflammation."

Here are five other ways to lessen arthritis pain:

Drink conservatively. AARP notes research shows that women who drink as little as three cocktails per week are likely to reduce symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis.

Cherries. These bright red treats are loaded with antioxidants called anthocyanins that can reduce inflammation

and ease pain caused by arthritis.

Avoid purines. These natural chemical compounds are found in certain foods and drinks. Red meats are high in cholesterol, fat, and purines. Better alternatives include thin-sliced bologna, turkey, and chicken.

Get or stay active. Staying — or getting — physically active can ease pain naturally, experts note.

Relax your body. Acupuncture, massage, tai chi and yoga are alternative means of healing arthritis that aim to relax the body and mind to ease pain. □

Surprising Signs of Possible Health Problems

By Mary Martin

You probably know that unexplained pain, a runny nose, or a bulging waistline can all be signs of an underlying health condition. But how about short eyebrows, red palms, or cracked lips? In fact, these are among the surprising signs of hidden health problems.

Keep reading for indications your body may be subtly trying to tell you that you're unhealthy.

Premature Graying

Going gray before age 40 may be the result of an underlying medical issue. "If you have 50 percent gray hair before 40, you should probably be checked for diabetes," says Dr. Joan Liebmann-Smith, author of "Body Signs."

Rough Skin Spots

Freckles, moles, and blemishes are usually nothing to worry about. But rough scaly patches called solar keratosis are triggered by sun damage and are early warning signs of skin cancer. If you think you have solar keratosis you may want to book an appointment with your dermatologist.

Not-So-White Eyes

There are natural variations to the whites in eyes that are normal, and they can be caused by everything from lack of sleep to a hangover. But normally white eyes that turn yellow when you're run down may be a sign of something more serious. Gilbert's syndrome

happens when bilirubin builds up in the blood and causes jaundice. The syndrome can make sufferer's eyes look more yellow than white.

Short Eyebrows

Are you losing hair from the outer edge of your eyebrows? It could be a sign of an underactive thyroid. Hypothyroidism can also thin hair on your head. With the proper treatment, hair loss from a thyroid disorder can be corrected.

Creased Earlobes

A creased earlobe may increase your risk of heart disease by up to 77 percent. According to *The American Journal of Medicine*, a diagonal crease on one ear can increase the risk of heart disease by a third. Experts believe that the crease shows a lack of elasticity, which can have a negative impact on your arteries. Earlobe creases can also be a benign result of aging. If you're concerned, seek an appointment with your cardiologist to rule out heart disease.

Flushed Face

A flushed face may be the result of a skin disorder called rosacea, which most often affects women between the ages of 30 and 55. Women with rosacea should try to limit things like stress, sun exposure, and spicy foods, which all dilate blood vessels.

Cracked Lips

Do you notice the corners of your lips cracking, regardless of the weather? Cracks may be caused

by a shortage of B vitamins or zinc. If the cracks remain long term, a fungal infection may set in. If so, see your doctor for treatment.

Long Ring Finger

Is your index finger shorter than your ring finger? If so, it may mean you were exposed to high levels of testosterone in the womb. According to the University of Nottingham, that may make you more susceptible to arthritis of the knee. Try building up your muscles with leg raises for added knee support.

Cold Feet

Are your feet always cold while the rest of your body temperature remains neutral? It could be a sign of Raynaud's syndrome, which causes the blood supply to drain from fingers and toes. Raynaud's is often linked to several autoimmune conditions and should be checked out by a physician.

Red Palms

Red palms alone are nothing to be concerned about, but if you are experiencing red palms while also feeling sick and lethargic it may be an early sign of liver disease.

Swollen Neck

A swelling at the front of your neck may indicate a thyroid condition called Graves' disease. The disease is most common in women between 20 and 50, and is the result of an overactive thyroid. It becomes especially likely if you're also losing weight. □

FDA Approvals: Esophageal Defect, Cystic Fibrosis, Inflammation, Cancer

Compiled exclusively by Health Radar, here are the most significant new drugs and medical devices approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Device for Esophageal Birth Defect

A new medical device has been approved by the FDA to treat esophageal atresia, a birth defect that causes a gap between the esophagus and stomach. One in 2,500 babies in the U.S. is born with the condition.

Many babies with the condition develop an abnormal connection between the esophagus and the trachea that may allow esophageal fluids to leak into the airways and interfere with breathing. This new device is only intended for infants who do not have that condition or have had it repaired.

In a study of 16 infants, all had a successful joining of the esophagus. However, 13 developed a complication that caused narrowing of the esophagus. This complication is a frequent side effect of traditional surgery to repair the condition.

The new device should not be used in infants older than a year, who have teeth, or whose esophageal segments are more than four centimeters apart. Possible side effects of the device include stomach injury and gum irritation.

Kalydeco for Cystic Fibrosis

The FDA expanded approval for the cystic fibrosis drug Kalydeco (ivacaftor) to include 33 mutations of the disease, up from the previous 10 mutations. The decision was based on results of laboratory testing and previous clinical trials.

People with cystic fibrosis — roughly 30,000 of them in the United States — have a defective gene that causes mucus to become sticky and thick. Secretions gather in the lungs and digestive tract, leading to severe problems with breathing and digestion, and infections.

Common side effects of the drug include headache, upper respiratory tract infection, stomach pain, diarrhea, rash, nausea, and dizziness. St. John's Wort and similar drugs and supplements could diminish Kalydeco's effectiveness and should be avoided.

Actemra for Blood Vessel Inflammation

The injected drug Actemra (tocilizumab) was approved to treat adults with giant cell arteritis, an inflammation of the blood vessels (vasculitis). This form of vasculitis mostly involves blood vessels of the head. Traditional therapy includes large doses of anti-inflammatory drugs called corticosteroids.

Actemra was evaluated in clinical studies involving 251 people with giant cell arteritis. The drug will carry a boxed label warning of the possibility of serious infections. For that reason, live vaccines should be avoided while taking the drug. And Actemra should be used “with caution” among people at increased risk of gastrointestinal perforation or dangerous allergic-like hypersensitivity reactions, the agency added.

The drug was first approved in 2010 for moderately-to-severely active rheumatoid arthritis.

Keytruda for Cancers With Genetic Marker

Keytruda (pembrolizumab) was approved to treat any cancer that has a certain genetic biomarker, regardless of where in the body the cancer originated. Until now, the FDA has approved cancer treatments based on where in the body the cancer started.

The cancers targeted by this new drug have a genetic feature rendering them “microsatellite instability-high” (MSI-H) or “mismatch repair deficient” (dMMR). MSI-H/dMMR tumors are most often found in colorectal, endometrial, or gastrointestinal cancers.

Keytruda is designed to block the effect of certain proteins, helping the body's immune system fight the cancer cells. Of 149 people with such tumors who took Keytruda in clinical trials, nearly 40 percent had a complete or partial remission. And for 78 percent of those patients, the drug's effects lasted six months or more. The drug's most common side effects included fatigue, itchy skin, diarrhea, loss of appetite, rash, fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding shouldn't take Keytruda because it could harm a developing fetus or newborn. □

SINGLE PAINKILLER WITH ALCOHOL CAN KILL

Norwegian researchers found that taking a single oxycodone tablet with even a modest amount of alcohol increases the risk of respiratory depression, a potentially life-threatening side effect that can cause breathing to stop. A study published in *Anesthesiology*, the medical journal of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, found that seniors are especially vulnerable. In the study, a single tablet of the painkiller oxycodone combined with an amount of alcohol equal to a woman consuming three drinks decreased the amount of air breathed in a minute by 47 percent.



STRAWBERRY EXTRACT SLOWS BREAST CANCER

Strawberry extract can inhibit the spread of breast cancer cells, both in test tubes and in mice, according to a study published in *Scientific Reports*. Cells from a highly aggressive cell line were treated with strawberry extract, and researchers found the extract decreased the cells' ability to survive, blocked them from multiplying, and inhibited their ability to migrate throughout the body.

At the same time, the extract stimulated expression of a gene that is thought to suppress the spread of

tumors to the lymph nodes of breast cancer patients. In female mice, the extract reduced the size of tumors and stopped cancer cells from spreading to adjoining tissue.

EATING LEGUMES LOWERS DIABETES RISK

Adults at high risk of cardiovascular disease who eat a serving and a half of legumes — lentils, chickpeas, beans, and peas — every day have a 35 percent lower risk of developing Type 2 diabetes when compared to people who don't, says a study published in the journal *Clinical Nutrition*. The study found that lentils, in particular, were associated with a lower risk of Type 2 diabetes.

FRUCTOSE TIED TO LIVER DISEASE

Fructose, a form of sugar that's frequently added to sodas, cookies, and other sweets, is contributing to the increase of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) in adolescents and children, says a study published in the *Journal of Hepatology*.

NAFLD, which is the accumulation of extra fat in liver cells in people who drink little or no alcohol, is the fastest growing cause of liver disease worldwide. It is estimated to affect up to 30 percent of the general population in Western countries and up to 9.6 percent of all children and 38 percent of obese children.

DRUG SAVES MALE FERTILITY

Infertility is a common problem among men undergoing cancer treatments, because therapies often stop sperm production. But researchers at the University of

“FIT AFTER 50” FACT

Exercise is not only important to preventing health problems, but also critical to recovery from some conditions, particularly stroke. That's the upshot of a new study that shows physical inactivity can negatively affect one's independence following a stroke. “Individuals can reduce their risk of dependence before and after stroke events by being physically active, which in our study was defined as participating in rigorous activity at least 3 times a week,” explains Dr. Pamela M. Rist, professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Rist and her colleagues tracked 18,117 people to determine if a person's BMI (body mass index) could predict future disability. Those who were physically inactive were significantly less likely to be independent three years after a stroke, compared with those who exercised regularly.

Texas at San Antonio found that a drug that prevents infections in cancer patients can also preserve their fertility. Doctors noticed that patients who took G-CSF (granulocyte-colony-stimulating factor), a drug that stimulates the bone marrow to produce infection-fighting white blood cells, didn't have the normal damage to their reproductive ability, and the drug appeared

to have the ability to restart the production of sperm in men who had childhood cancer.

ALPHA-LIPOIC ACID PREVENTS KIDNEY STONES

Cystinuria is a rare inherited disease that causes recurrent, painful, and damaging kidney stones due to cysteine crystals that accumulate in the urinary tracts of people who have the condition. But a natural dietary supplement may be able to help.

Research published in *Nature Medicine* found that a supplement called alpha-lipoic acid increased the solubility of the cysteine crystals and kept stones from forming. Researchers were able to prevent stones from developing in mice and to slow the development of stones that had already formed.

BACTERIA MAY BE KEY TO PREMATURE BIRTHS

A study at the University of Pennsylvania may have found the key to premature births: bacteria in the mom's cervix. Analysis of vaginal swabs of pregnant women found that specific types of bacteria, such as the probiotic *Bifidobacterium* and *Lactobacillus*, lowered the risk of preterm birth, while others such as anaerobic bacteria, significantly increased the risk.

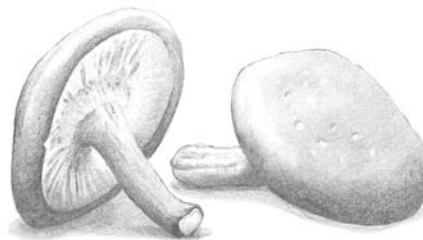
Bifidobacterium and *Lactobacillus* are found in the gastrointestinal tract and play important roles in the immune and digestive systems. Anaerobic bacteria are also found in the digestive tract and play a role in appendicitis and diverticulitis.

B VITAMINS HELP FIGHT SCHIZOPHRENIA

Adding high doses of B vitamins,

— including B6, inositol, and B12 — to the daily medicine regimes of patients with schizophrenia significantly reduced symptoms of the debilitating disease, says a study published in the journal *Psychological Medicine*. Patients usually experience remission when treated with antipsychotic drugs, but 80 percent relapse within five years.

Researchers found that B-vitamin interventions which used higher dosages or combined several vitamins were consistently effective for reducing psychiatric symptoms, whereas those which used lower doses were ineffective.



MUSHROOMS TREAT DEMENTIA AND ALZHEIMER'S

Many mushrooms contain bioactive compounds that may increase nerve growth in the brain and protect against inflammation and other neurotoxins, says a study published in the *Journal of Medicinal Food*. Researchers found that some mushrooms contain rare compounds that exhibit positive effects on brain cells both in vitro and in vivo. They discovered that the extract of lion's mane mushroom (*H. erinaceus*) had positive effects on brain cells without being toxic, and also helped brain cells recover from damage and injury.

H. erinaceus also improved the cognitive function of aging Japanese

men and women who had mild cognitive impairment.

RESVERATROL SLOWS LUNG AGING

Resveratrol, a polyphenol found in red wine, may protect aging lungs. Scientists at Saban Research Institute at Children's Hospital Los Angeles used mice genetically modified to age early to investigate whether degenerative changes in the lungs could be slowed by inhaling resveratrol. The lungs of mice that received resveratrol for three months (delivered through the airway by endotracheal tube), showed a slowing in the decline of lung function, a significant factor for the development of chronic lung diseases such as COPD.

MAPLE SYRUP STOPS SUPERBUGS

Phenols found in maple syrup enhance the bacteria-killing ability of commonly used antibiotics ciprofloxacin and carbenicillin. When researchers from Canada's McGill University mixed the phenolic extract with either of these medicines, they found a synergistic effect that allowed them to get the same antimicrobial effect with upward of 90 percent less antibiotic treatment.

The method worked on a variety of bacterial strains, including *E. coli*, which can cause gastrointestinal problems; *Proteus mirabilis*, responsible for many urinary tract infections; and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, which can cause infections often acquired by patients in hospitals. Using fewer antibiotics can help deter the creation of superbugs that become immune to antibiotics. □

Take Vitamins K2 and D3 for Better Heart and Bone Health

By William S. Maxfield, M.D.

Data now available show that there is a mineral that may significantly increase the rate of aging in the heart by depositing hardening products in the aortic valve.

The mineral, of course, is calcium.

When you take too much calcium, it tends to go to your heart instead of your bones. Therefore, you need to be sure that your body's metabolism is working well enough to handle the amount of calcium that you take in.

The ability to properly control calcium is dependent upon a vitamin that many people are hardly even aware of — vitamin K2.

The original work showing that calcium metabolism could be modified by nutritional intake was by Dr. Weston A. Price.

Years ago, he learned in the course of his dental practice that many people who were having trouble with their jaws often had other related medical problems.

Dr. Price found a product called Activator X that could help facilitate the absorption of calcium in the bones and teeth, rather than allowing it to get into the bloodstream.

Recently, it was determined that the active ingredient in Activator X was vitamin K2.

Research has also found that vitamin K2 helps maintain good brain function, decreases wrinkles on the skin, aids with prostate health, and helps support good muscle strength.

Now research has found another nutrient that is also necessary for heart and bone health: vitamin D3. In fact, for vitamin K2 to work well, the body has to have an appropriate amount of vitamin D3.

Of course, vitamin D3 is synthesized in the skin with exposure to sunlight. Unfortunately, many people are not very active these days, and do not get enough sun to provide optimal amounts of vitamin D3 to be synthesized. And as people get older, the ability of their bodies to produce vitamin D3 from sun exposure decreases.

Based on current data, people will need to supplement with 180 micrograms of vitamin K2 and at least 1,000 IU of vitamin D3 to maintain optimal heart and bone health.

Once again, evidence indicates that excessive calcium can damage the heart. To manage calcium at an appropriate level, you have get adequate amounts of both vitamin K2 and vitamin D3.

Updated Form of Acupuncture

In the past, I have written about a device called the Biomodulator, which I consider to be an updated form of acupuncture.

The reason acupuncture works is that the needle that is placed into the patient acts as an antenna. The acupuncturist placing the needle is a bigger antenna, so you are changing the electrical potential in the area where the needle is placed.

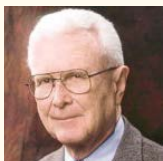
The Biomodulator can do the same thing by placing an electrode to stimulate the acupuncture points but without the need to have a needle placed inside the patient's body.

The Biomodulator was developed by Dr. Jerry Tennant, and has been very well-received.

It is effective predominantly for treating pain, but is also good for other conditions such as skin wrinkling.

Dr. Tennant also treats patients with hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT), and has recently published new research data about its use for fibromyalgia, demonstrating that 70 percent of patients who receive HBOT have significant improvement of their condition. □

Dr. William S. Maxfield, M.D., is a board-certified physician in hyperbaric medicine, radiology, and nuclear medicine. He is one of the nation's foremost experts in hyperbaric medicine. He has served on the faculties of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine, and LSU Medical School. He also has served as the chief of the Radioisotope Laboratory at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Bethesda, Md. He currently is in private practice in the Tampa Bay, Fla., area.



Foods That Lower Blood Pressure Naturally

By Gary Greenberg

Millions of Americans take medication to combat hypertension stage — a silent killer that raises risk for stroke and heart attack. But some foods naturally lower blood pressure as effectively as popping pills. Here's what you need to know.

“Hypertension is a major cardiovascular risk factor, not only for heart attack but especially for stroke,” says Miami-based cardiologist Dr. Michael Ozner, author of the bestselling book “The Complete Mediterranean Diet.”

If you are at risk of approaching the hypertension stage — blood pressure in excess of 140/80 — there is a lot you can do to stop it before popping pills.

“First, try lifestyle intervention,” he says. “Get some exercise, learn relaxation techniques, and eat right. The Mediterranean diet has proven to lower blood pressure.”

The Mediterranean diet limits sugars, refined carbohydrates, and saturated fat while going heavy on fruits, veggies, whole grains, and healthy fats. Add the following six foods that have been shown to naturally lower blood pressure:

Tart cherry juice. Researchers found hypertension sufferers who drank just two ounces of this superfood a day averaged a 7 percent drop in blood pressure.

Walnuts. Replacing snack food with walnuts helped knock three points off the resting blood pressure of participants in a study at Penn State University.

Beet juice. Beets are rich in

nitrate, which your body turns into nitric oxide, which relaxes blood vessels and is a natural blood thinner. A *Hypertension* study reported systolic pressure of subjects who drank a cup of beet juice a day fell eight points.

Flaxseed. In one study, systolic blood pressure dropped 10 points in people who ate ground flaxseed every day. Diastolic pressure went down by seven points.

Yogurt. Eating good quality yogurt offers you two proven hypertension busters: calcium and probiotics.

Dark chocolate. A popular choice, but the key is in eating just one square a day. And it should be a type of chocolate that contains more than 50 percent cocoa. Do that, and you can lower your blood pressure. □

Alan Thicke's Heart Attack Spotlights Need for Lifesaving Screenings

By Lynn Allison

Actor Alan Thicke's sudden death from a fatal heart attack at the age of 69 last year is prompting cardiovascular experts to call for more Americans to undergo a simple screening test that evaluates fitness level and spotlighting potential risks. The American Heart Association issued a statement suggesting that aerobic fitness should be considered a vital sign of health routinely checked by doctors — just as body

temperature, blood pressure, and breathing rates are now.

“Screening for aerobic fitness may have identified abnormalities that would have prompted intervention for Mr. Thicke, particularly if he had risk factors and had a cardiac stress test performed. A stress test could have likely identified a blocked artery,” says Dr. Kevin Campbell, a cardiologist who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of heart rhythm disorders.

Risk factors for heart disease include smoking, high cholesterol, diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity. But Dr. Gabe Mirkin, author of “The Healthy Heart Miracle,” notes that lack of exercise is a major risk factor too. The AHA says treadmill tests may still be prescribed for those at high risk for heart disease based on other factors, but physicians could calculate a person's cardiorespiratory fitness based on simple equations and a few keystrokes. □

Can Magnet Therapy Treat Alzheimer's?

A noninvasive therapy using magnets could soon be used to treat Alzheimer's disease, say researchers at Canada's McGill University. Transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) uses a cap that sends a brief magnetic pulse through the scalp to manipulate activity in the brain. A study published in the journal *Neuron* found that when TMS delivered magnetic pulses that matched natural brain waves, subjects performed better at auditory memory tasks. Researchers believe TMS could compensate for the loss of memory caused by Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases. Australian researchers are currently using TMS in the world's first human trial with Alzheimer's patients. The technique stimulates nerve cells on the surface of the brain in the hope it will slow the development of Alzheimer's. The treatment targets the buildup of beta amyloid plaques in the brain. TMS treatment has already shown potential to treat migraine, depression, and schizophrenia.

Stem Cell Treatment Cures Impotence

A stem cell treatment restored sexual function to some — but not all — prostate cancer patients who had undergone surgery to remove their prostates. In a Phase 1 clinical trial, researchers used stem cells taken from the abdominal fat of Danish men via liposuction. After the stem cells were isolated, they were injected into the *corpus cavernosum* area of the penis in hopes of restoring damaged nerves. The men were discharged from the hospital the same day. Within six months, eight out of the 21 patients reported they had achieved sufficient erectile function to enable intercourse. Good function was maintained for a year. Researchers hope the therapy can restore sexual function in men who suffer from erectile dysfunction from

other causes, including diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The condition affects almost half of all men between the ages of 40 and 70.

Muscle Cell 'Patches' Improve Failing Hearts

Japanese researchers used stem cells from a patient's thigh muscle to grow patches that were placed on the heart during surgery. It's a different approach to treating heart failure than past studies which injected stem cells, often from a patient's own bone marrow, into the heart. For the study, which was published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*, Dr. Yoshiki Sawa and his team coaxed stem cells harvested from thigh muscles to grow into small, thin sheets. The process appeared safer than injected stem cells, and patients appeared to have improvements in heart function and exercise capacity for up to a year. Sawa says that the stem cells don't change into heart muscle cells but appear to produce cytokines that spur new blood growth in damaged parts of the heart. Although treatments exist to treat heart failure, including medications, implantable devices, and heart transplants, regenerating areas of damaged hearts are a better alternative. One year after surgery, 96 percent of the patients were alive and 84.3 percent were still alive three years later.

Therapy Stops Cystic Fibrosis

Although treatments have improved the lives of cystic fibrosis patients, they still only have an average lifespan of about 40 years. But a novel therapy developed by American and Italian researchers not only corrects genetic defects but also reduces the inflammation characteristic of the disease. Cystic fibrosis is caused by mutations in a gene that affects the balance between salt and water in the lungs. The mutation leads to a thick buildup of mucus in the lungs and other organs. The mucus clogs airways, limiting the ability to breathe, and traps bacteria which leads to infections. The new therapy, called Thymosin α 1, is a synthetic version of a naturally occurring peptide and corrects defects in the mutated gene, offering the potential to stop progression of the disease. Although not available in the U.S., T α 1 is approved for use overseas to treat viral infections and immunodeficiency diseases. □

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