

# Get Into **betterHEALTH!** with Dr. Derek Lee

To join our e-mail list for our **free monthly newsletter**, just send the e-mail links of your friends and family to:  
[drlee@yourbetterhealthguide.com](mailto:drlee@yourbetterhealthguide.com)

**betterHEALTH clinic**  
3838 Midland Ave., Suite 103  
Toronto, ON, M1V 5K5  
416-291-5120

April 2005: In this issue!

- **Spring Allergies? Dr. Lee Recommends Black Walnut**
- **Obesity Increases Risk of Atrial Fibrillation**
- **Obesity and Health Care Expenses**
- **Early Detection of Melanoma**
- **Overweight and Physical Activity in Predicting Mortality**
- **Alcohol-Attributable Deaths and Years of Life Lost**
- **Standards for Overweight Using BMI and Waist Girth**
- **Alcohol Consumption and Mortality and Quality of Life**
- **Trans Fatty Acids and Systemic Inflammation**
- **Office Hours**

More interesting tidbits on what to consider when eating healthier and happier! Enjoy!

Dr. Derek Lee

## ● **Spring Allergies? Dr. Lee Recommends Black Walnut**

Spring is here and if you are an allergy sufferer, you may like the heat but hate the sinus congestion, itchy eyes and sneezing. I've found that over my 12 years in practice that one of the most effective remedies for spring allergies is called "Black Walnut". An increase in intestinal parasites is often the reason for season allergies. Black walnut is a wonderful anti-parasitic.

## ● **Obesity Increases Risk of Atrial Fibrillation**

Atrial fibrillation is the most common cardiac rhythm disturbance (an electrical disturbance resulting in abnormal beats) and is linked with high morbidity and mortality rates (such as stroke) despite treatment with drugs. Researchers from Harvard and other medical schools studied this condition in 5,282 people over a period of 13.7 years. They found that men were 1.52 times more likely to develop atrial fibrillation if they were obese (BMI 30+) compared to men of normal weight (BMI <25). In obese women the risk increased 1.46 times compared to healthy weight women.

Obesity puts an extra load on the heart that results in left atrial enlargement (a chamber in the heart). This in turn raises the risk for abnormal beats or atrial fibrillation. The good news is that reduction of excess weight is linked to regression of left atrial enlargement. By preventing excess weight gain, or losing excess weight, you have a direct affect on the function of the heart. The researchers emphasized that even a small decrease in obesity could lead to a "large reduction in the incidence of atrial fibrillation."

Source: Wang TJ, et al. Obesity and the Risk of Atrial Fibrillation, JAMA 292:2471-2477, Nov. 24, 2004

## ● Obesity and Health Care Expenses

Another report shows how much excess weight costs in terms of extra medical care. Northwestern University Medical School looked at average Medicare expenses of 9978 men and 7623 women. They divided the study group into 4 groups based on their weight or BMI (healthy weight, over weight, obese, and very obese) when they were young adults to middle aged. When they reached the age of 65 they then tracked average health care expenses until they died or reached the age of 83.

## ● Early Detection of Melanoma

Melanoma is the dangerous form of skin cancer that needs to be found early to prevent serious complications and death. The National Cancer Institute has used an "ABCD" acronym for self screening for melanoma. They are now adding "E" as fifth screening criteria to help persons differentiate between a normal mole or pigmented skin feature and melanoma.

- **A**symmetry - the different halves of the skin lesion do not look the same
- **B**order irregularity - shaggy, or ill-formed
- **C**olor variation - not the same color throughout the lesion
- **D**iameter greater than 6mm (1/4 inch), about the size of a pencil eraser
- **E**volving - changing in size, shape, shades of color, symptoms (itching, tenderness), or surface (such as bleeding)

It's not necessary to have all of these signs. If any of these signs occur, check with your doctor or dermatologist (skin specialist) for further evaluation. The sooner you identify a possible melanoma, the greater your chance of a cure before it spreads. Here are some practical steps you can take to help prevent melanomas:

- Avoid prolonged exposure to the sun, especially during peak hours of 10 am to 4 pm. Avoid tanning booths. Wear sunglasses in sunlight because melanoma can occur in the pigmented areas of the eyes. Wear a hat and clothing that covers the arms, legs, and the rest of the body. Protect children from the sun and tanning booths. Excess exposure before age 18 incurs a higher lifetime risk. Use sunscreen when exposed to the sun (SPF 15 or higher).
- Examine your skin regularly using the ABCDE guidelines.

Abbasi NR et al. Early Diagnosis of Cutaneous Melanoma, JAMA 292:2771-76, Dec. 8, 2004

## ● Overweight and Physical Activity in Predicting Mortality

A large study including 116,564 women looked at the impact of being overweight and/or physically inactive on mortality rates. After 24 years of follow-up, over 10,000 deaths occurred. Analysis showed the following results of excess body weight:

- Women with a body mass index (BMI) of 21-24.9 had the lowest death rates (in nonsmokers, a BMI less than 23 was ideal)
- Overweight women who never smoked (BMI of 27-29.9) had a 67% increased risk of early death compared to lean women
- Obese women who never smoked (BMI of 30-32.9) had a 2.1 times greater risk of early death

- A BMI of 35-39.9 doubled the risk of early death
- A BMI of 40+ in nonsmokers showed a 4-fold increase in risk of early death

## ● Alcohol-Attributable Deaths and Years of Life Lost

The CDC recently issued a report on the effects of alcohol on mortality and potential years of life lost. They state that excessive alcohol consumption is the third leading cause of death in the United States and is linked to many adverse health consequences including:

- liver cirrhosis
- several cancers
- unintentional injuries from motor vehicle accidents, drownings, and other accidents
- violence including a major contribution to suicides and homicides

CDC estimates that there are 75,766 alcohol attributable deaths yearly and 2.3 million years of life lost due to alcohol use each year in the U.S. The average person who dies from an alcohol cause loses approximately 30 years of life on the average. The majority of these early deaths involve males (72%). The editorial accompanying this report in JAMA points out that this estimate is most likely understated. They give 6 reasons why the actual number of alcohol related deaths is most likely even higher than estimated. This report illustrates the magnitude of the problem of excessive alcohol intake on the health of the nation. The editorial also points out the need for increased attention to this problem and for increased screening of excessive alcohol use by doctors and others in the health care system.

Source: Alcohol-Attributable Deaths and Years of Potential Life Lost -- United States, 2001, JAMA, Dec. 15, 2004

## ● Standards for Overweight Using BMI and Waist Girth

New standards for defining overweight continue to evolve. The World Health Organization now recommends the following definitions for being overweight in Western populations and Asian populations after studying weight and coronary risk factors in over 15,000 Chinese adults:

Measurement (to be overweight)	Western Populations	Asian Populations
Body mass index (BMI)	BMI 25+	BMI 24+
Waist girth	Men 37+ in. (94+cm) Women 32+ in. (80+ cm)	32+ in. (80+ cm) for men & women

Measurements above these values are associated with higher risks for cardiovascular and metabolic health conditions. Asians appear to have greater levels of fat at lower BMI and lower waist girth measurements than Western populations. Even though Chinese are less obese, coronary heart disease is now the leading cause of death in China with increases in mortality expected to climb significantly over the next 10 years. In this study the risk of high blood pressure, high blood lipids, and diabetes, were higher with each increase in BMI and waist girth measurement. The authors encourage all health professionals to use these new standards in evaluating weight and for optimal health.

Wildman RP et al. BMI and Waist Circumference Categories, Amer J Clin Nutr 80:1129-36, Nov. 2004

## ● Alcohol Consumption and Mortality and Quality of Life

High alcohol consumption is responsible for well known health hazards and societal ills. Moderate alcohol consumption, however, is often suggested to have some health benefits, especially to the cardiovascular system. Some people even recommend its use for health reasons. Other views have suggested that the apparent benefits may be due to a "healthy user bias" (many people with problems quit drinking) or to the short time lines of the studies reporting benefits.

The University of Helsinki conducted a very long-term study, 29 years, on a large group (1808) of men, comparing their drinking status during midlife (average age 48) with mortality and quality of life in later life. They divided the men into 3 groups: nondrinkers, moderate drinkers (about 1 drink per day), and heavy drinkers (3+ drinks per day).

## ● **Trans Fatty Acids and Systemic Inflammation**

Trans fatty acids have been linked to increased risk of coronary heart disease and risk of diabetes. New research from the Nurses' Health Study I and II show that trans fatty acids are also linked to an increase in systemic inflammation, especially in women who are overweight. Systemic inflammation is an emerging risk factor for coronary artery disease, insulin resistance, diabetes, abnormal lipids, and heart failure.

Trans fatty acids are formed when vegetable oils are hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated by food manufacturers. The average consumption of trans fatty acids is about 4-7% of total dietary fat. The Institute of Medicine in its Recommended Dietary Intakes (RDIs) recommends avoiding all trans fats as far as possible ( a 0 intake). The primary sources of trans fats are:

- Fast foods
- Commercial bakery products
- Packaged snacks and dinners
- Margarines

You can avoid trans fatty acids by using vegetable oils in place of shortening, buying trans fat free margarines (read labels) and making your own baked goods using oils in place of partially hydrogenated oils. When you read a food label, look for the words "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated." If it is present it has trans fatty acids. The actual amount of trans fatty acids will soon be on all labels. Be a smart shopper. Choose foods without trans fats for best health.

Mozaffarian D et al. "Trans Fatty Acids and Systemic Inflammation", Amer J Clin Nutr 2004; 79:582-92.

## ● **Office Hours. (Effective January 1, 2005)**

### betterHEALTH Clinic

Monday, Wednesday 9:15 - 12:00/2:30 - 7:00  
Friday 9:15 - 10:30/4:00 - 6:00  
Saturday 9:00 - 12:00 (every other Saturday  
as of January 8, 2005)

### Corporate Clinics

Monday Shepherd Village Long-Term Care Facility  
Tuesday Kraft Canada, (Moatfield & Parklawn facilities)  
Rogers Peel  
Thursday Rogers Cable York Mills  
Friday Rogers Cable Richmond Hill

416-291-5120

drlee@yourbetterhealthguide.com