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Meditation may boost immunity

Researchers at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center have uncovered evidence that meditating may help women recover from breast cancer. James R. Hebert, a professor of medicine and epidemiology who headed the study, found in preliminary tests that women who meditated increased their levels of the immune-function-enhancing hormone melatonin, which appears to play a role in fighting breast cancer. With \$1 million in grants from the U.S. Army, Hebert will institute an in-depth study of 180 women to take a four-year look at the physical and psychological effects of meditation on breast cancer recovery.

SKIN CANCER UPDATE

The latest addition to the long list of benefits of a low-fat diet is a decreased risk of certain forms of skin cancer. The results of a recent study conducted at Baylor College of Medicine showed that subjects who reduced their fat intake from about 40 percent of calories consumed (a typical American statistic) to about 20 percent developed far fewer precancerous growths than those with higher fat intakes.

"Avoiding excessive sun exposure is still the best way of preventing skin cancer," says Homer S. Black, Ph.D., a professor of dermatology at Baylor, who headed the study. "Nonetheless, a low-fat diet can have far-reaching effects."

The most dangerous form of skin cancer, melanoma, is most likely to occur among fair-skinned individuals with light eyes and hair, especially if they react to sunlight with freckles and burns. Another important risk factor, according to The Skin Cancer Foundation in New York City, is the number of dark moles that are as large or larger in diameter than the eraser tip on a pencil. A self-examination body count that turns up more than six such moles, the Foundation announced recently, suggests a higher lifetime probability of developing melanoma. And anyone, regardless of skin color or sunburn history, should be suspicious of a mole that changes its size, texture, color, or behavior by itching, burning, or bleeding. Have it checked out by a dermatologist as soon as possible.



Meditation might prove to be more than a way to find peace of mind.

A new alternative to the much-hated and much-feared dental drill allows dentists to diagnose and treat certain kinds of

cavities with a brief, air-driven blast of fine particles. The air-abrasive-technology approach spares the person in the dentist's chair the unpleasant sensations of heat, vibration, and noise, not to mention the word dentists dare not mention—namely, pain.

The technique, originally developed in the 1940s, is catching on now because, due to fluoridation and other advances, today's cavities tend to be less extensive, notes Ronald E. Goldstein, an Atlanta dentist and clinical professor of oral rehabilitation at the Medical College of Georgia School of Dentistry.

Painless Dentistry—At Last

If a cavity is detected early, before decay delves into the tooth, tooth damage and pain can be avoided. The air-abrasive system,

says Goldstein, makes quick work of these cavities, as well as stains and previously undetected decay in the teeth. What's more, since the stream of alpha alumina powder used in air abrasion roughens the tooth surface, it creates an ideal foundation for resins (tooth-colored fillings). Extensive decay, unfortunately, still needs to be treated the old-fashioned way.

"But," Goldstein says, "that should be all the more incentive to apply air-abrasive technology early on." About 5 percent of dentists already employ such units, and the number is rising steadily. ▶