Summer shorts: What you may have missed while beating the heat

written by Dr. Ronald Hoffman | July 26, 2019

The summer heat is taking its toll on everything from our tolerance for sweat to our attention spans! So, this week, I'm bringing you a handful of short, easily digestible health news updates. Pour yourself a tall glass of iced tea and take a quick breather to catch up on what's new.

The "Anti-Autumnal Diet"

There's a new diet making the rounds: the "Anti-Autumnal Diet". Its motto is "Don't Eat for Winter" (DEFoW).

It's based on the observable natural phenomenon that animals destined for winter caloric deprivation—like squirrels, but also presumably our Paleo human ancestors—stock up on foods simultaneously rich in carbs and fat to build up their adipose tissue stores. The acorn represents just such a scrumptious calorie bomb, and hence it's part of the DEFoW logo. But it pales in caloric impact compared to such modern fare as doughnuts, French fries, chips, chocolate, ice cream or waffles drenched in butter.

In fact, although we never are subjected to the "famine season" which our forebears evolved to survive, we're yearlong consumers of ubiquitous autumnal foods which stoke our appetites and enlarge our waistlines.

The idea then, is to scrupulously decouple fats from carbohydrates and eat them apart from one another for weight loss. For example, a carbohydrate meal should be separated by hours from a fat meal. This gets around the dietary monotony of an exclusively very low-fat or very low-carb diet.

DEFoW also explains the seeming paradox of why both low-fat and low-carb diets work for weight loss, but only if they faithfully exclude mixed meals that engage our hard-wired metabolic capacity for fat storage.

So, if diets have failed you so far, try eating like a squirrel constrained by seasonal acorn shortages.

Too many snack options make kids fat

“Smaller portions” is the mantra of the food industry when confronted with stark obesity statistics. But a new study indicates that, when it comes to snacks, variety trumps serving volume in stoking kids’ food consumption.

“Children who were offered more snack items consumed considerably more energy and a slightly higher food mass. Manipulating box/container size had little effect on consumption,” researchers found. (Source)

What it boils down to is keeping kids out of harm’s way by limiting snack options. And, while youngsters need to eat more frequently, minimizing feeding opportunities is essential if we’re to stem the tide of childhood obesity. Leaving a multitude of tempting snacks all over play areas is just bad parenting.

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Caffeinated beverages are dehydrating—REALLY??

During this recent spate of hot weather, health experts have been piously intoning admonitions to “avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages” and just drink plenty of water. No question booze prompts diuresis which leads to net fluid deficits, but are caffeinated iced coffee and teas a no-no?

Turns out not. While it’s true that drinking copious amounts of coffee can prompt bladder urgency, studies demonstrate that it’s not consequential to overall hydration status. A definitive 2014 research article put that shibboleth to a deserved final rest.

If only “authorities” would bow to the evidence and stop spouting unfounded warnings!

Cholesterol is brain food—eat more to stave off neuro disorders?

It’s no culinary secret that brains—known in France as *cervelles de veau* —are a delicacy rich in cholesterol. The brain needs cholesterol for synthesis of myelin, the waxy sheaths that insulate nerve tracts. In multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune attack results in deterioration of myelin; MS is fundamentally a demyelinating disorder. Hence researchers sought to determine whether deliberate cholesterol feeding could stem the neurodegeneration that robs MS sufferers of their muscle power. They fed cholesterol-enriched chow to mice with an experimental model of MS (“Dietary cholesterol promotes repair of demyelinated lesions in the adult brain” *Nature Communications*, January 2017).

Lo and behold, the cholesterol helped slow and repair MS lesions! The authors conclude: “This study highlights the safety of dietary cholesterol and might have implications for the management of demyelinating diseases . . .”

But if cholesterol helps MS, it would stand to reason that lowering cholesterol via statin drugs would have a harmful effect on MS patients. In fact, the opposite has been found. Why the seeming paradox?

It appears that statins exert a beneficial impact on MS via their anti-

inflammatory effects. This may outweigh the negative consequences of cholesterol-lowering.

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I've often noted that many of the MS patients I treat have unusually high cholesterol. It's thought by the authors of the above-quoted study that this may represent a compensatory mechanism of revved up de novo synthesis of cholesterol to combat the disease.

After all, 95% of cholesterol is made by the body; only a small percentage is derived from dietary sources. Plus, the blood-brain barrier prevents the ingress of most circulating cholesterol to the brain.

Why, then, might cholesterol feeding help boost brain levels of cholesterol in MS? It's thought that MS sufferers have "leaky" blood-brain barriers, resulting in ingress of otherwise excluded blood elements, including cholesterol.

It's worth keeping in mind the success of the Terry Wahl's protocol for MS, which advocates "nose-to-tail" consumption of animal protein within a Paleo Diet; organ meats like liver and kidney are exceptionally-rich sources of cholesterol.

But aren't statins implicated in cases of cognitive decline—sometimes mimicking Alzheimer's Disease—which are remarkably reversed on cessation of cholesterol meds? Dr. Beatrice Golomb and others have documented numerous cases of this, and the FDA has even issued a warning that an occasional side effect of statins can be memory loss.

But here, again, evidence is mixed. Since Alzheimer's is an inflammatory disorder, and clogged blood vessels are a feature of vascular dementia, statins might help. And, they're currently recommended for stroke prevention.

Nevertheless, it's worth noting that studies confirm that cholesterol that is too low is a risk factor for hemorrhagic strokes—brain bleeds. And high cholesterol has been found to predict better memory and cognitive function in over-85s.

Bottom-line, sugars and pro-inflammatory Omega 6 fatty acids from processed junk food are likely to pose more serious dangers to the brain than oft-stigmatized cholesterol.

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