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Let Sleeping Children Lie


Dr. David G. Williams

I've written numerous times about the detrimental changes in dietary habits and an overall lack of exercise that have led to an epidemic of childhood obesity in this country. I truly feel that we have failed a couple of generations of children, who are being subjected to diseases and health problems that until just recently were seen only in the very elderly. We're already seeing increases in heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

Recently, researchers took blood samples and blood pressure readings of 1,717 eighth-grade students from 12 predominantly minority schools in Texas, California, and North Carolina. Almost a quarter of the students had high blood pressure, almost 20 percent were at risk of being overweight, nearly 30 percent were overweight, and about 17 percent had high total cholesterol levels. Keep in mind that these were 14-year-old children. (*Pediatrics 06;117(6):2065–2073*)

If those figures aren't scary enough, consider a recent report from New York State Senate minority leader David Paterson. While 28 percent of high school students in his state are overweight, *33 percent of children aged 2 to 5 are overweight.*

The pharmaceutical companies have to just love this. Each year their markets grow by leaps and bounds. And the little attention that has been paid to the problem of obesity has primarily been focused on its consequences: major diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular problems. The more subtle ramifications of this disaster will continue to unfold for decades. It's a far bigger problem that anyone seems to realize.

Generation Z-Z-Z

For example, it's only been within the last few years that we've started to realize the importance of proper sleep to the overall health of adults. Sleep apnea is finally being taken seriously. With increased education and proper treatment, the health and well-being of millions of adults has improved. A growing number of children now suffer from the same problem but their condition is totally ignored.

The most common form of sleep apnea is called "obstructive" sleep apnea, in which the airway narrows either from relaxation of the throat muscles or from something that blocks the air passages. One of the primary causes of sleep apnea is obesity. Excess fatty tissue collapses during sleep and partially blocks the airway. The problem is compounded further by allergies, food sensitivities, and reactions to various food additives, any of which can create inflammation and swelling in the adenoids and tonsils.

Childhood is the period of greatest brain development, so sleep apnea at that stage of life can have even more serious long-term effects than in an adult. Children with sleep apnea experience nerve injury to the frontal cortex and hippocampus regions of the brain. Additionally, levels of neurotransmitter compounds are decreased. These alterations occur when the brain is repeatedly starved of vital oxygen. Sadly, a child who suffers from these effects will live with the consequences for the rest of his or her life, never reaching full cognitive potential.

In This Issue

You will observe with concern how long a useful truth may be known, and exist, before it is generally received and practiced on. — Benjamin Franklin

One study on sleep apnea, involving children ages six through 16, compared their IQ and brain function to those of healthy controls. The children with sleep apnea had an average IQ of 86, compared to 101 in the control children. Those with sleep apnea also scored significantly lower in tests of memory, speech fluency, and other brain functions. (*PLoS Med 06;3(8):e301*)

Not only is sleep apnea going unacknowledged in children, it's harder to detect—even if you're looking for it. Children may exhibit the same characteristic signs as adults: snoring, gasping, periods of non-breathing, and abrupt awakenings. More often than not, however, apnea in children presents itself as unusual sleeping positions, an arched neck, or labored breathing. More attention has to be paid to how they sleep and whether, overall, they are getting a good night's sleep. Children with sleep apnea will often exhibit behavioral problems during the day such as irritability, lack of concentration, and extreme fatigue.

Missing the Point

With the poor diet these days and the large number of children suffering from allergies and congestion problems, it's no surprise that when childhood sleep apnea is detected it is generally treated with the surgical removal of tonsils and adenoids. The success rate for this procedure is reportedly as high as 80 percent. These glands contribute to immune system function, so I'd prefer to see steps taken that would reduce their work load (which, in turn, reduces their size) rather than removing them.

Various dietary changes can work wonders, including the removal of milk products and other common food allergens, the elimination of refined sugars, and an increase in the intake of water and vegetables. If the apnea problem stems from obesity, then obviously losing weight through a proper diet and exercise is the answer.

The Point

In small children, particularly those under age 3 or 4, probiotics and/or foods that supply friendly bacteria to the lower bowel can often work wonders in clearing up food allergies. During the birthing process babies generally get "inoculated" with new friendly bacteria from their mother's system as their mouth comes into contact with the vaginal tissue. Babies born through cesarean section don't receive this benefit and are definitely at a disadvantage. Their intestinal tract has to greet the world without these friendly, disease-fighting bacteria.

One study has shown that rather than resorting to "food avoidance" diets, where the offending food is eliminated from the diet, one can prevent the allergic problems associated with many foods by adding kefir "milk" to the diet.

(I've written about some of the magical properties of kefir in past issues when discussing the importance of beneficial bacteria in the diet and fermented food products. Next month I'll dig a little deeper into the benefits of kefir and show you a simple way you can make it part of your overall health program.)

Researchers at the National Formosa University in Yunlin, Taiwan, have just discovered that various strains of beneficial bacteria in kefir milk block the pathway involved in allergic responses.

(For those of you who are more technically minded, kefir inhibits the production of the allergen-specific antibody called immunoglobulin E [IgE]. This component of the immune system deactivates organisms that potentially cause disease. IgE also triggers the release of histamine—which, in turn, stimulates allergic responses such as inflammation and airway constriction.)

Not only was kefir milk able to reduce IgE production in response to many foods commonly known to cause allergies in children, it also prevented food antigens from passing through the intestinal wall. Whole kefir milk has been used for centuries in many countries to wean babies. Not surprisingly, these researchers concluded that certain components could possibly be isolated from kefir and utilized as medicines. (*Chem Ind 06;Oct 16* and *J Sci Food Agric doi:10.1002/jsfa2469*)

Many food allergies result from what has been called a "leaky gut," where undigested and/or foreign proteins pass through the intestinal wall and enter the blood

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stream. This latest research indicates that kefir milk has the potential to stop the process.

The Consequence of Ignorance

In adults, obstructive sleep apnea is frequently treated using CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure). The patient wears a breathing mask during sleep and a machine pumps air under pressure—which helps keep the airway open.

These machines are not set up for use with children, and trying to keep a mask on a small child during sleep would obviously be a challenge. The ideal situation would be to correct the cause of the obstructive problem—whether it be obesity, food allergies, or whatever—and do it as soon as possible.

It took decades to recognize sleep apnea as a serious problem in adults. Even today, most cardiologists don't screen for it, even though it has been shown to have a direct influence on heart and brain function. We have millions of tired, chronically fatigued, walking and driving zombies in this country because of sleep apnea. One study estimated that over 28 percent of all commercial truck drivers in this country had the problem, but screening still isn't part of the certification process. (*J Occup Environ Med 06;48(9 Suppl):S4–37*)

I don't know how long it will be before the public and the medical profession acknowledge the problem in children. Unfortunately, the situation isn't just related to future difficulties with cardiac function or intense fatigue. Left uncorrected, we're talking about irreversible damage to the child's brain function and IQ. Through neglect, we're in danger of "dumbing down" an entire generation or two of future adults.

If you have young children or grandchildren, watch for sleep apnea. I doubt you'll be hearing about this from any other source any time soon. There's only a short window of opportunity in which to correct the problem. We need to give our children every chance to increase their cognitive abilities. In the long haul it improves all our lives.

Estée Lauder Was Right

Cosmetics companies have recently begun promoting their products using a health-related message, but for years they've focused on vanity when selling their women's products. It turns out they may have been on to something. A study out of Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany showed that once a woman reaches menopause her skin begins to age faster than a man's. (*Optics Lett 06; 31(19): 2879–2881*)

The researchers were working on a laser-based non-invasive way to assess skin health. Until their invention the only method was by taking a biopsy sample, which meant that a single area couldn't be examined for changes over time. In this trial, technicians used lasers to examine levels of collagen and elastin, two proteins that provide strength and elasticity in skin. The relative levels of the two substances in the dermis (the second layer of skin) make a good marker for damage caused by disease, aging, or exposure to toxins such as solar radiation.

Physicians who treat skin diseases such as eczema or scleroderma are particularly interested in being able to monitor the progress of treatment. Collagen and elastin are also involved in the formation of wrinkles, so I suppose it won't be long before cosmetic companies are using the process to test the effectiveness of whatever cream they're pushing. Hopefully it will also be a valid tool to help consumers determine which creams actually work.

Taking Care With Chemicals

The skin contains estrogen receptors, which helps explain why a woman's skin tends to get thin and more wrinkled so quickly once menopause begins. The presence of estrogens in the skin improves thickness and elasticity, the amount of moisture, and collagen content.

I'm not sure just how effective topical application of estrogen or estrogen-like compounds might be at improving skin thickness or elasticity. Again, it will be interesting if this can be tested using this new laser technology. There was a recent study which suggested that skin care and hair products containing certain plant oils can increase estrogen levels when applied topically.

An endocrinologist, Dr. Clifford Bloch, near Denver, had treated numerous cases of gynecomastia (abnormal breast enlargement) in pre-pubescent boys since 1990. After doing a bit of medical detective work searching for the reason, he found the guilty party wasn't excess hormone production, but rather the use of products containing lavender and/or tea tree oil.

All the boys apparently had been using soap, hair gel, body wash, moisturizer, or cologne made with these oils. When he instructed them to stop using the products their gynecomastia problems resolved within a few months.

To better understand what was going on, Dr. Bloch contacted researchers at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (a part of NIH). Their tests revealed that both oils mimic the actions of estrogen, and at the same time reduce the activity of male hormones or androgens. This suggests that these oils would

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NEWS TO USE FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Migraine Prevention

QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA—By now most people are familiar with the relationship between high levels of the amino acid homocysteine and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke. What's less known, however, is the link between homocysteine and migraines.

Doctors who monitor their patients' homocysteine levels, and treat any problem with vitamins B12, B6, and folic acid, frequently find the vitamins also reduce or eliminate migraine headaches in those patients.

New research has found a genetic mutation known as C677T. This mutation has been known to result in higher-than-normal levels of homocysteine, and has been found in a significant number of individuals who suffer from migraines. It now appears that as many as 10 percent of those who suffer from migraines may do so because of elevated homocysteine levels. Currently studies are underway at Griffith University in Australia to determine how lowering homocysteine levels with vitamins can reduce migraine problems.

If you suffer from migraines and haven't found relief, there's no need to wait for the year or more that the above study could take. Supplementing with additional vitamin B12, B6, and folic acid is safe, simple, and inexpensive. If it's going to help, you should begin to notice a difference within a couple of weeks. Although the preliminary estimates are that deficiencies in these vitamins are the causative factor in only 10 percent of migraine cases, I suspect it might turn out to be higher than that. If you have cardiovascular problems and/or your laboratory tests have shown higher levels of homocysteine, then there's an even higher chance that you fall into this group. Either way, this could be a simple solution to a debilitating problem.

Pomegranate for Prostate

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA—I've been preaching the benefits of pomegranates and their juice long before it was fashionable. Research continues to reveal that the fruit provides a long list of health benefits.

The latest findings come from the University of California at Los Angeles, where researchers discovered that pomegranate can have a significant effect on the recurrence of prostate cancer.

Patients who undergo either surgery or radiation treatment are closely monitored afterward for any changes in their PSA levels. A detectable PSA level immediately following these treatments is generally an indication that the cancer is very aggressive. Once the PSA level doubles, additional treatment programs are started.

The Los Angeles study involved 46 patients. Those whose PSA levels were detectable following therapy were given 8 ounces of pomegranate juice daily. The pomegranate juice prolonged the time it took for PSA levels to double in these men by almost fourfold. The doubling time went from an average of 15 months to 54 months, which is nothing short of amazing. (*Clin Cancer Res 06;12(13):4018–4026*)

This study clearly indicates that pomegranate juice can inhibit the progression and growth of active prostate cancer. It didn't focus on actual prevention, or on the use of pomegranate juice as a cure for prostate cancer. However, based on other research studies I would have no problem recommending its use as part of a program to prevent prostate cancer. And while it might on its own be an agent that could cure prostate cancer, again I would certainly recommend it as part of an overall program.

How pomegranate juice works is still not fully understood. I'm sure that's the primary reason that it is still being studied so widely. Once we learn the exact mechanism or components in pomegranates that are responsible for these feats, they will be synthetically replicated and sold as drugs. When that happens, I have no doubt that pomegranates will immediately lose favor within medical circles and fall into the category of questionable, ineffective home remedies. Don't be fooled into believing that nonsense. The research has already shown that pomegranates and pomegranate juice work.

I currently have 3 large pomegranates in my refrigerator (this is about the only time of the year when they are available) and two quarts of the juice. If you want a very enjoyable way of preventing prostate cancer and a long list of other health problems, I suggest you stock your refrigerator as well.

Drinking Responsibly

ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA—With the new year upon us, this next tidbit of information might help you have a safer, more enjoyable holiday.

If you use sugar-free drinks to mix with alcohol you might be getting more than you bargained for. Researchers have discovered that artificial sweeteners, when compared to sugar, affect both the emptying time of the stomach and the peak blood alcohol concentrations. (*Am J Med 06;119(9):802–804*)

The stomach took 36 minutes to empty half of a drink sweetened with sugar, but only 21 minutes to do so with a diet drink. Additionally, the blood alcohol level from the diet drink averaged 0.05 percent, compared to only 0.03 percent with the regular drink.

In simple terms, when alcohol is mixed with diet drinks instead of regular sugar-sweetened drinks, the

alcohol goes into your bloodstream quicker and peaks at higher levels.

I personally don't recommend or drink any kind of soft drink. I don't think they have any value whatsoever from a health standpoint. I also realize I'm in the minority on this subject, so rather than get on my soapbox again, for now I'll just say keep the above in mind if you mix soft drinks with alcohol.

Blessed Silence

ST LOUIS, MISSOURI—Individuals with tinnitus (constant ringing in the ears) might benefit from a short course of melatonin.

In a small unblinded study, tinnitus patients took 3 mg of melatonin daily for four weeks and reported significant improvement in both their ability to sleep and their tinnitus symptoms. The patients were monitored for a total of eight weeks, including four weeks after discontinuing the supplement, and they continued to report overall improvements. (*Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg 06;134(2):210–213*)

The study was small, with only 24 patients. And the fact that patients knew they were taking melatonin very well could have affected the results. Obviously, it wasn't a perfect study, but with such positive results melatonin would certainly be worth a try. It's readily available, safe, and inexpensive.

Getting Really Long-Term Results

EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND—Over the years there have been quite a number of theories relating to the determination of intelligence. Phrenologists thought you could tell by examining the bumps on a person's head. Some misguided sociologists thought that national or ethnic origin had something to do with it. There was even a theory that the shape of a person's head was an indicator.

The Scottish Council for Research in Education thought they would add to the field of knowledge, so in 1932 all 87,498 Scottish schoolchildren who had been born in 1921 took a standardized test. The educational theories that came out of the results have come and gone, but the original records sat intact in a storehouse for more than 60 years. Finally, researchers at the University of Edinburgh realized that they could use information from these records to assess the effects of real life on cognitive ability.

In 1998, they gathered all of the original participants they could find, and administered the same test that was given in 1932. After scoring the tests, and comparing the results with those from 66 years earlier, some interesting trends emerged. One fairly predictable trend was that intelligence as a child is a good indicator of intelligence later in life.

Another trend was that physical ability is associated with cognitive ability. When the investigators measured grip strength, walking time on a 6-meter course, and lung function, they found that those people with better physical function had retained more of their mental abilities. (*Neurology 06;67(7):1195–1200*)

Roughly a year ago I wrote about the concept of a "cognitive reserve" to help guard against mental decline. [*Editor's note: See Vol. 11, No. 9*] Regular mental stimulation—word and number puzzles, taking up a new hobby, listening to a variety of styles of music—will help you build that reserve. But if you consider the stimulation to be the seeds of thought, you still need good ground to begin with or nothing useful will grow. Physical activity is the fertilizer for your brain.

(Curiously, the investigators came to a different conclusion. For some reason they believe that higher intelligence during childhood leads to better physical condition later in life. Something about being more attentive to public-service health messages.)

The researchers in this recent study looked at markers of physical fitness rather than asking about activity levels, but you don't get or stay physically fit by sitting in the easy chair. As I've written before, something as simple as walking increases blood flow to the brain, which should result in better memory, greater learning, and longer attention span. The results from Edinburgh confirm the connection.

Emergency Preparedness

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND—A local paramedic has come up with a very practical solution for helping emergency personnel contact relatives following an accident or other crisis.

The idea is to store a contact number in your cell phone or other portable address device under the heading "ICE," which stands for "In Case of Emergency." You could also list it as ICE-Dad, or ICE-Mary, et cetera.

During an emergency, oftentimes one of the more confusing problems for emergency personnel is knowing who to contact. They have to sort through pockets, notes, or whatever trying to determine who they should call. It's a simple matter, however, for them to scroll through the cell phone contacts and look for the ICE listing. It also allows you to determine who you would want to be contacted.

The idea has gone over well in England, and I suspect will do so in this country as well. It's the kind of idea I like…inexpensive, easy, and it works.

(*News to Use continued on page 150*)

NEWS TO USE *(CONTINUED)*

The Changing Face of Fats

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON—A study conducted at the University of Washington's Cardiovascular Health Research Unit has identified a beneficial trans fatty acid. The researchers examined the blood of 214 people who had died of heart disease, and compared it to the blood of the same number of people who had heart disease but had not died. Analysis of the red blood cells showed that high levels of trans linoleic acid—the omega-6 fatty acid commonly found in partially hydrogenated vegetable oils—roughly doubled the risk of death from heart disease. On the other hand, high levels of trans oleic acid—the major fatty acid in olive and macadamia nut oils—*cut* the risk of heart-related death by two-thirds. (*Circulation 06;114(3):209–215*)

With all the attention paid to fat in one's diet, people—and that includes scientific researchers—sometimes lose sight of the fact that there are both good and bad types of fat. Even when the distinction is made, it's often at a level so broad that it turns out not to be useful.

The first attempt at the division of fats was between saturated (bad) and unsaturated (good). Now, of course, we know that saturated fats aren't nearly as bad for your health as was first thought. The fats in butter, and the short- and medium-chain fatty acids found in coconut and palm oil, are actually beneficial in many ways. And many of the omega-6 unsaturated fats contribute to inflammation and, consequently, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and a host of other diseases.

The next shot at distinguishing good from bad involved trans fatty acids. Generally speaking, when trans fatty acids are metabolized and incorporated into cell structures, they cause disturbed cell functioning. There are known exceptions to this rule, however. For example, the beneficial compound known as CLA is a naturally occurring trans fatty acid.

Up to this point, writers (myself included, I have to say) have recommended caution when cooking with olive oil. There was concern that excessive heat, say from frying, would change the monounsaturated oleic acid into a trans compound and negate all its healthful benefits. Based on this latest information, this may not be the case. However, I would still suggest that you not use olive oil to deep-fry anything. My gut feeling tells me that the closer you consume olive oil to its natural state the more you'll benefit. I think it's wonderful to cook with in general (sautéing, pan frying, et cetera) or to consume straight from the bottle with bread, on salads, et cetera. It's definitely one of my favorite oils and I highly recommend it. If you must deep-fry something (I should probably rephrase that and say, if you're dying to deep fry something) then try to use a more stable oil like palm or even peanut oil.

[*Editor's note: The topic of fatty acids can be mystifying without a bit of background information. To find out what trans fatty acids are and why they can be bad for you, visit the Subscriber Center of* DrDavidWilliams.com. *Chemistry degree not required.*]

(*Skin Health continued from page 147*)

show activity in young girls similar to that shown in boys. I'm not sure what the effects might be in adults, but females with estrogen-dependent cancers of the breast or female organs may want to curtail their use of such products. They certainly wouldn't want to be slathering products containing the oils on their skin regularly.

I haven't run checks in an attempt to compile a list of products that contain lavender or tea tree oil, but I'm sure it would be a very long list. I do know, however, that the Calvin Klein Eternity for Men product line doesn't contain lavender. You probably should be reading the labels if you have young children in your household or someone has an unexplained case of gynecomastia.

Keeping That Healthy Glow

Getting back to the earlier discussion, based on these latest findings I would suspect we'll see natural skin care products in the near future that claim to increase estrogen levels. And they may work. Just keep in mind that hormones can be a double-edged sword.

Another interesting point made in the study using lasers to measure collagen levels was that even within a specific area such as the forearm, different spots on a person's skin could have different "ages." The localized changes could well be due to differences in circulation, which is of course essential for delivering nutrients and taking away metabolic waste material.

If you're concerned about your appearance—and really, who isn't—one beneficial step you can take is to keep your circulation in good condition. Exercise that's vigorous enough to make you sweat increases blood flow near the surface as your body works to throw off heat.

There are a few other simple methods you can use to increase circulation to the skin. Saunas can also promote both blood flow and the removal of toxins. The B vitamin niacin can dramatically increase blood flow to the skin—which is what creates the familiar "skin flushing" sensation.

And don't forget that a properly functioning thyroid gland is essential for healthy skin. This time of year many people find they need to increase their use

of lotions and creams to keep their skin from drying and cracking. Many times the underlying problem actually stems from an underactive thyroid. Circulation to the skin is greatly influenced by thyroid activity. Your thyroid also regulates the metabolism of the fat-soluble vitamins so desperately needed by the skin. It also produces hormones that allow your body to absorb glucose—which is crucial since, unlike other tissues, your skin doesn't have the ability to store glucose.

Drugs That Get on Your Nerves

The dangers of the cholesterol-lowering statin drugs are well-known by now. Among the long list of their negative effects, the drugs can deplete your body of CoQ10. I've written about those dangers on several occasions, and I'm not the only one doing so.

What's more shocking, however, is that the so-called "effectiveness" of statins is based on the false premise that cholesterol is the cause of heart disease. And research continues to show that despite widespread use of the various statin drugs, the number of heart attacks and deaths from heart attacks remains fairly stable. The evidence is there: statins are very dangerous drugs, and they are only minimally effective at reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, or death from any cause. Fish oils, CoQ10, vitamin C, vitamin E, L-carnitine, garlic, B vitamins, magnesium, lecithin, modified citrus pectin, eliminating sugar from the diet, et cetera, all do a better job without any of the dangerous side effects.

One of the more serious and debilitating side effects, nerve degeneration, may be receiving the least attention.

Years ago I wrote a full-length report discussing the benefits of cholesterol and need for adequate amounts of it in the body. [*Editor's note: The report,* The Truth About Protecting Your Heart*, is available from Mountain Home Publishing, at 800-718-8293.*] Today, when you mention the word cholesterol it automatically conjures up negative images of heart disease and clogged arteries. Everyone seems to have forgotten that cholesterol is a natural compound necessary for life.

The Innocent Culprit

Cholesterol is a modified fat called a sterol. It's actually more like a wax than a fat or an oil, which gives it special properties. Every cell in your body manufactures and contains cholesterol, but most of the cholesterol in your body is manufactured by your liver, with smaller amounts made by your small intestine. Approximately 1,500 to 1,800 mg of cholesterol is produced by your body every day (unless you're taking statins) and only between 200 and 800 mg comes from the average diet.

If you could totally eliminate all cholesterol from your diet, your body would attempt to compensate by increasing its production. On the flip side of the coin, increasing cholesterol in the diet causes the liver to cut back on production to help maintain constant levels. Current discussions on cholesterol seem to ignore the findings of the famous Framingham study in which 437 men and 475 women were observed for up to 10 years and there was no correlation between the dietary intake of cholesterol and serum cholesterol levels. (*Am J Med 77;62:707–708*)

I don't think there is even one controlled study that shows lowering cholesterol on its own saves lives. There are studies that show a reduction of certain fats in the diet can increase mortality, but not cholesterol. In fact, lowering cholesterol levels in older individuals can be dangerous to their health.

Building for the Present

If cholesterol were really the problem, we would be doing everything possible to eliminate the breast-feeding of babies. Breast milk is loaded with cholesterol, and might be considered a ticking time bomb. But we know that infants thrive on breast milk. The cholesterol is used to build strong cell membranes and nerve cells in the brain and throughout the entire body.

The essential functions attributed to cholesterol could fill a small book, so I won't go into them all here. One of the primary uses in the body is as a building block to help construct cell membranes. Its waxy nature not only helps cells maintain their shape and strength but also forms a special protective barrier against the entry and/or exit of various substances. In the ever-present, ill-considered quest to lower cholesterol levels we're starting to see more and more cases of what certainly appears to be degeneration of nerve and muscle cell membranes. This has become increasingly apparent with the introduction of statin drugs.

The manufacturers of statin drugs list over 130 possible side effects. Muscle pain, tenderness, and weakness are just a few of the primary ones. Although the manufacturers fail to acknowledge it, based on what I've heard directly from many users and/or their written accounts it certainly appears to me that these neuromuscular degeneration problems could be from the disruption of cholesterol production.

Cholesterol is an insulator for nerve fibers, and as I mentioned earlier it's also a primary component in the structure of cell walls. When either the coating or the

cell walls themselves begin to break down you start to see distinct changes in an individual's ability to function. The symptoms are those associated with neurological disease or damage, so it shouldn't come as any surprise that among statin users we're seeing more unexplainable cases being diagnosed as "mini" strokes (TIAs), senility, chronic fatigue, depression and, in more progressed cases, ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or Lou Gehrig's disease).

I have no doubt that widespread statin use is causing many of these problems. And what makes the situation so distressing is that the statin drugs do so little for most people in the first place.

If you know of someone who still takes statin drugs (which is now practically anyone who has been diagnosed with a cardiovascular or high cholesterol problem), please warn them of the associated problems. Any sign of unexplained muscle weakness, cramps, twitching, slurred speech, difficulty in walking or motor skills, nerve pain, depression, memory loss, et cetera, could be just the tip of the iceberg. There are individuals in wheelchairs being diagnosed with ALS who can now trace their problems back to statin drug use. Don't let it happen to you or to someone you love.

Use Your Head—Or Lose Your Brain

You might be wondering why there haven't been class action lawsuits and why the FDA isn't investigating the problem. Attorneys I've spoken with say the only way a lawsuit would have a chance would be for the FDA to recall the drugs. Obviously, it goes back to the "golden rule"…he who has the most gold makes the rules.

Statin drugs have become the top-selling class of prescription medications. One drug alone, Lipitor, accounted for sales of $12.2 *billion* in world-wide sales in 2005. Zocor sales were $4.4 billion. The estimated total sales of this class of drugs was over $20 billion.

Our own government is planning on a dramatic increase in spending for all prescription medications, and I'm sure the statin drugs have a prominent place in those plans. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have projected that prescription drug spending will increase from $188 billion in 2005 to $446 billion in 2015.

Thanks to the miracle of modern medicine (or pharmaceutical marketing) it seems like every day we're finding "cures" for problems we never knew we had. Situations that define normal life like childhood enthusiasm, mood swings, puberty, childbirth, changes in sexuality, menopause, aging, et cetera, have all become pathological conditions requiring treatment. Meanwhile very little has been done in finding real cures for problems such as cancer. I'm beginning to believe that the unwritten creed of modern medicine and the pharmaceutical industry is "a healthy person is one who has not been thoroughly examined."

The money is in the masses, and society is being turned into one big sanitarium. And when the mass of patients isn't large enough, then they lower the thresholds of normal—which increases the number of people who need to be treated. A prime example was when our National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in 2004 suggested that anyone with LDL cholesterol over 100 mg/dL needed to be treated, replacing the previous recommendation of 130 mg/dL. The American Heart Association quickly agreed and millions of otherwise healthy individuals in this country were instantly "at risk."

Karl Kraus, the Viennese satirist, described this problem perfectly. He once joked that "diagnosis is one of the most common diseases."

Unfortunately, it's not much of a joke anymore.

If I were a betting man (and I'm not) my money would be on the pharmaceutical companies being able to milk the statin cash cow for many years to come. Just don't let them do so by stealing your most valuable possession: your health.

Take care,

If you have questions or comments for Dr. Williams, please send them to the mail or e-mail addresses listed to the right. Of course, practical and ethical constraints prevent him from answering personal medical questions by mail or e-mail, but he'll answer as many as he can in the Mailbox section of *Alternatives*. For our part, we'll do our best to direct you to his issues, reports, and products related to the subject of your interest.

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