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Vitamin D is associated with a lower risk of cancer

A daily dose of 1000 IU of vitamin D could reduce the incidence and mortality associated with colon, breast, prostate, and ovarian cancer, an extensive review says.

The review searched PubMed in December 2004 for epidemiological studies looking at the association between cancer and vitamin D, sunlight, ultraviolet radiation, and latitude. The study, which was published online ahead of print publication in the *American Journal of Public Health* on 27 December (www.ajph.org, doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2004.045260), found 63 observational studies, and of these 30 looked at colon cancer, 13 at breast cancer, 26 at prostate cancer, and seven at ovarian cancer. Most studies found that a sufficient intake of vitamin D protected against cancer.

The researchers, led by Cedric Garland, from the University of California at San Diego, said: "The evidence suggests that efforts to improve vitamin D status, for example by vitamin D supplementation, could reduce cancer incidence and mortality at low cost, with few or no adverse effects." They say that vitamin D deficiency may account for several thousand premature deaths from colon, breast, ovarian, and prostate cancer each year.

David Spurgeon *Quebec*

Managed alcohol intake improves health of homeless alcoholic people, study shows

A managed programme for homeless people with chronic alcoholism can stabilise their alcohol consumption, a new Canadian study shows, decreasing the number of visits to emergency departments and encounters with police.



Coffee is associated with lower risk of breast cancer in women with BRCA mutations

High consumption of coffee may reduce the risk of breast cancer among high risk women, an international study indicates.

The case control study assessed the association between coffee consumption and breast cancer risk in 845 BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutation carriers with breast cancer and a control group of 845 mutation carriers without breast cancer recruited from 40 centres in four countries: Canada, Poland, the United States, and Israel (*International Journal of Cancer* 2006;118:103-7). A self administered questionnaire was used to estimate average coffee consumption over their lifetime.

The results showed that women with BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutations who consumed at least six cups of coffee a day seemed to have a significantly lower risk of breast cancer than BRCA mutation carriers who had never drunk coffee. The odds ratios for breast cancer in BRCA carriers who habitually drank 1-3, 4-5, and >6 cups of coffee per day were 0.9 (95% confidence interval 0.72 to 1.12), 0.75 (0.47 to 1.19), and 0.31 (0.13 to 0.71), respectively, compared with BRCA carriers who drank no coffee (P for trend = 0.02). The beneficial effect was found only for caffeinated coffee.

Barbara Kermod-Scott *Calgary*

The study, published last week in the journal of the Canadian Medical Association, showed that the number of police encounters fell by 51% and emergency department visits fell by 40% among the participants, a small group of homeless alcoholic people who had repeatedly failed to complete abstinence programmes (*CMAJ* 2006;174:1).

Fifteen men and two women with an average age of 51 years and a mean duration of alcoholism of 35 years were enrolled in the pilot programme for between five and

24 months (mean duration 16 months). The programme provided close supervision, help with activities of daily living, on-site health care, and a maximum of one drink hourly (up to a maximum of 140 ml of wine or 90 ml of sherry) on demand between 7 am and 10 pm each day.

Average daily alcohol consumption among the participants fell over the course of the programme, from 46 drinks a day before the programme to eight afterwards. Health, nutrition, and hygiene also improved.

Barbara Kermod-Scott *Calgary*

New leader commits Tory party to an NHS that is free to all

In a move away from Thatcherite politics, David Cameron, the new leader of the Conservative party, committed his party to providing a health service that is free to everyone at the point of need.

But he said that if his party was elected to government he would increase the percentage of NHS services provided by the private sector beyond the 15% limit imposed by Labour.

In the launch of his new health policy at the King's Fund health research institute in London last week he said the Conservatives aimed to make the NHS "into a more efficient and more patient centred service" and would end targets and bureaucracy.

He said the political right had "spent too much time trying to get people out of the NHS and into the private sector." He added that Mrs Thatcher's policy of giving tax benefits to people with private medical insurance and his party's policy of creating a "patient's passport"—to provide financial support to those patients able to buy private operations—were both examples of this.

Mr Cameron said the Conservatives would give increased powers to foundation trusts and GPs and would take a leadership role on public health.

Faye van Emmerik *London*

US tries to increase routine hepatitis B vaccination

The US government is increasing its efforts to eradicate hepatitis B by calling for all newborn babies to be vaccinated before they leave hospital.

The plan, published in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (23 December, 2005), also says that vaccination should be a requirement for entry to school, and it sets out how hospitals should improve the monitoring of pregnant women.

Also, efforts are under way to