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FAST, STEADY WALKING BETTER THAN SHORT SPURTS OF EXERCISE

In recent years, federal health experts have advised people to "accumulate" 30 minutes of exercise over a day most days of the week. But a new study suggests that daily exercise is best done in one, steady 30-minute dose. A small study, involving 30 middle-aged women found that those who walked briskly for a half-hour burned more calories than those who did their walking in 10 minute periods throughout the day. The study, by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, measured the women's calorie expenditure as they walked briskly for 30 minutes over three days: on one day they walked briskly for a half hour, the next they walked for three 10-minute periods. The difference: 60 calories more per day when walking was done continuously. If that doesn't sound like much, the researchers point out that over a year, it could amount to losing around five pounds. The study appeared in the January issue of *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*.

LONG-TERM USE OF GLUCOSAMINE HELPS OSTEOARTHRITIS

We reported in February's newsletter that a number of clinical trials are underway to study glucosamine and chondroitin in relieving symptoms and improving mobility in osteoarthritis (OA). Results have just come in from a trial of glucosamine sulfate in Belgium, which found that long-term use of the supplement not only helps relieve knee pain, but also appears to prevent changes in joint structure. The trial randomized 212 OA patients to either 1500 milligrams (mg) of glucosamine or placebo once a day for three years. Radiographs of the patients' knee joints were taken at the start of the trial and at one and three years. Among the 106 patients in the glucosamine group, there was no significant loss of joint space after three years, compared to a progressive joint narrowing among the placebo group. Symptoms improved 20% to 25% among those taking glucosamine. The study appeared in the January 27th issue of the *Lancet*.

★ HERBAL REMEDY FOR PMS

If you suffer from premenstrual syndrome (PMS), which often gets worse in a woman's 30s and 40s and during perimenopause, you might want to try *chasteberry tree fruit*. A study from Germany among 170 women randomized to 20 milligrams a day of chasteberry extract (also known as *Vitex agnus castus*) for three consecutive menstrual cycles, found that the herbal treatment helped reduce most PMS symptoms by at least 50%. The study, reported in the January 20 *British Medical Journal*, said that 52% of the women taking chasteberry fruit reported fewer headaches, less breast fullness, irritability, anger and mood alteration, compared to 24% of women in the placebo group. The symptom not helped by chasteberry was bloating. The researchers conclude that, since side effects were minimal, "this herbal remedy ought to be considered a therapeutic option" for PMS.

WOMEN WARNED ABOUT MERCURY IN FISH

The Food and Drug Administration is warning women of childbearing age – and pregnant women – to avoid eating certain kinds of fish which may contain high levels of mercury. Mercury occurs naturally in the environment, but can also contaminate the air and water through industrial pollution. Swordfish, shark, king mackerel and tile fish contain high levels of methyl mercury, which can damage the developing nervous system of a fetus. These longer-lived, larger fish that feed on smaller fish accumulate the highest levels of mercury and pose the greatest threat. (This includes commercially caught fish as well as those caught by family or friends.) The FDA advises women who are pregnant, or who may become pregnant, to select other kinds of fish – including shellfish, smaller ocean fish or farm-raised fish. They can safely eat 12 ounces per week of cooked fish. For more information, check the Environmental Protection Agency website: www.epa.gov/ost/fish

DOES ERT BENEFIT THINNER WOMEN MORE?

A 12-year study of almost 300,000 post-menopausal women has found that estrogen use reduces the risk of dying, but thinner women seem to reap the most benefits. The study, reported in the January 15 issue of the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, found that post-menopausal estrogen replacement therapy (ERT) can cut the risk of dying of heart disease by more than 50% in the leanest women, but does not appear to have the same benefit for heavy women. The body mass index (BMI) of the heaviest women in the study was over 30 (considered obese by health officials) and the BMI of the thinnest women was under 22 (a BMI of 25 or under is considered normal to thin). The study, by researchers at the American Cancer Society, did not investigate why ERT seemed to be more beneficial for thinner women, but they speculate that heavier women have higher circulating levels of natural estrogen after menopause and adding more may not be helpful in reducing heart risk. The study also found deaths from cancer were lower among women on ERT. Participants in the study did not have heart disease or cancer at the start of the trial in 1982.