

Health news

Bringing doctors back

The provincial government's plan to repatriate Canadian doctors back to Ontario has won the approval of the Ontario Medical Association.

Health Minister George Smitherman has announced that an additional 58 specialist residency training positions will open this year, up from 760.

He said the province will also stage a recruitment drive in New York and Boston this spring to try to persuade 3,000 registered doctors to come back to the province.

Down syndrome progress

Lab mice with Down syndrome became smarter after being fed a drug that strengthened brain circuits involved in learning and memory, a new study reports.

After receiving once-daily doses of pentylentetrazole, or PTZ, for 17 days, the mice could recognize objects and navigate mazes as well as normal mice, researchers said.

The improvements lasted up to two months after the drug was discontinued, according to the report in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*.

Scientists said the study opened an avenue for research in a field that had seen little success.

Senior study author Craig C. Garner, a Stanford School of Medicine professor, said his lab is preparing to conduct human trials of the drug, although he said it would take time to complete more preliminary studies and procure a supply of purified PTZ.

Blood needed

Recent severe weather in several parts of the country has prompted Canadian Blood Services to appeal for donors to avoid potential shortages.

The national organization says winter storms in Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador in particular, resulted in blood clinic closings last week.

While there is no current blood shortage, Canadian Blood Services is appealing for donors to help replenish its supply.

Potential donors are encouraged to book an appointment by calling 1-888-2-donate.

Garlic study disappoints

A new study suggests a clove of garlic a day does not keep cholesterol away.

Stanford University researchers looked at 192 people with moderately high cholesterol who took raw garlic, garlic supplements or a placebo.

After six months, their cholesterol levels had not changed. Researchers say the finding is disappointing, but it's still possible garlic could have characteristics other than influencing cholesterol that might benefit the heart.

Mindfully active

Couch potatoes of the world: You may be able to enhance what little exercise you get just by happily pondering the value of it.

In a novel study, psychology researchers from Harvard University found that hard-working hotel housekeepers who were tutored on the fitness value of their tasks experienced marked health improvements.

Within four weeks of learning that the physical demands of their daily tasks provided good exercise, the 44 room attendants lost an average of two pounds, lowered their blood pressure by almost 10 per cent and logged statistically meaningful reductions in body-mass index, body-fat percentage and waist-to-hip ratio, compared with 40 housekeepers in an uninformed group.

But not everyone is buying the results.

"My first thought was, 'When are they publishing them, April 1?'" says Dr. Patrick O'Neil of the Medical University of South Carolina.

O'Neil believes the findings can be chalked up to "the fact that the people in the informed group received more information related to health and exercise," which led to undetected changes in activity level.

Harvard Medical School's Dr. Harvey Simon was impressed by the drop in blood pressure, and says, "If people are mentally feeling better and healthier, there could be a psychological effect."

Lead author Alia Crum acknowledges there's no way to know for certain whether the housekeepers, after hearing of the health benefits of the tasks they were doing, might have unconsciously put more "oomph" into their work.

But the results are defended by co-author Dr. Ellen Langer, a noted expert in an area known as "mindfulness," which, simply put, is mentally focusing on what is happening in the moment.

Research suggests that "we have more control over our health and well-being than we realize," Langer says, "and the bottom line is that the way to achieve this is by increasing our mindfulness" to the tasks at hand.

— Compiled by Florence Sicoli from *Hamilton Spectator* news services

Trainer's DVDs spread message of injury-free exercise

Train away the pain

BY ROBIN SUMMERFIELD

CALGARY ♦ Denise Beatty knows the struggle of living in chronic pain.

The Calgary-based personal trainer and exercise physiologist was in two serious car crashes within two years in the late 1990s.

The second crash left her with extensive knee, hip, neck and back injuries.

It also left her in tremendous, unremitting pain down her left side.

Yet, throughout her recovery, Beatty kept working out, doing her special brand of core stability exercises.

Using the balance ball, resistance bands, weights and compound exercises that engage multiple muscle groups at the same time, Beatty found relief from her pain as she built up overall muscle strength.

She also ended up whittling herself to a lean shape, losing 30 pounds and reducing her body fat by 8 per cent.

"The exercises saved me, that's for sure," says the 32-year-old.

Now, Beatty hopes to spread the message of pain-free living — and pain-free fitness and exercise. Her personal program, named the *Fitness Fix*, is now available on three fitness DVDs.

The *Fitness Fix* is focused on building overall core strength, balance and endurance to prevent exercise injuries in the first place or help people recover from injuries.

Unlike other exercise videos, Beatty's has no background music. Instead, throughout each video she talks about body mechanics, proper alignment and injury prevention as she demonstrates each exercise.

Each DVD is divided into multiple sections that target different zones of the body.

Beatty says she fine-tuned the program with the help of a physiotherapist, a chiropractor and a physician.

Apart from her own recovery, Beatty was inspired to develop the *Fitness Fix* after seeing "client after client" with chronic injuries and pain caused by exercising.

"I am so focused on building the muscles you need to prevent injuries," says Beatty.

Her DVD exercise program focuses heavily on strengthening those core



CANWEST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO

Denise Beatty's own experience with chronic pain led her to develop a series of DVDs that she calls the *Fitness Fix*.

stability muscles, proper exercise posture, body alignment, flexibility and total body toning, and strengthening using a balance ball, balance disk, free weights and resistance bands.

More than just preventing injuries,

Beatty says the program will help anyone drop weight, reduce their body fat and lose inches.

"The amount of calories burned is so huge because you are using so many different muscles," she says.

Beatty's DVDs are available at fitnessfix.ca and cost \$19.95 each or \$49.95 for all three.

CanWest News Service

Ask a dietitian

Tea up to the green

BY SUZANNE NEUMANN

Q: What are the benefits of green tea?

A: Refreshing and calming, tea is a welcomed guest to cups and mugs worldwide.

The three main kinds of tea leaves — black, oolong and green — differ in the way they are prepared. The extra benefit of green tea lies in the fact that its leaves are steam dried at once — preventing the loss of antioxidants — as opposed to black and oolong tea leaves, which are partly dried and allowed to ferment.

The benefits:

■ A number of studies link regular drinking of green tea to a lowered cancer risk.

■ It is also believed to reduce the risk of heart disease in several ways: it may lower blood pressure, increase blood flow to the heart, prevent blood clotting and lower "bad" cholesterol.

■ It is a satisfying, calorie-free beverage as long as you don't add sugar, so it may promote weight control. Some studies suggest that green tea may boost metabolic rates.

■ Theophyllines in the tea leaves cause the airways in

the lungs to open, making breathing easier for those with asthma.

The drawbacks:

■ Large amounts of green tea may reduce vitamin and mineral absorption.

■ The amount of green tea that we need to drink to enjoy the benefits is not defined.

■ Products that advertise "with green tea" don't offer similar benefits.

Cosy up with green tea on these cold days. It is widely available, easy to ingest and tasty. Green tea appears to be safe and does not have any major side-effects.

Above all, tea is rich in antioxidants that protect cells from damage.

While no single lifestyle factor can provide the "magic bullet" to prevent diseases such as cancer and heart disease, tea may be used as part of a healthy diet to promote healthy living.

Suzanne Neumann is a registered dietitian with City of Hamilton Public Health Services. Readers with questions are invited to call the Nutrition & Physical Activity Advice Line at 905-546-3630.



Wellness events



Coping with toddlers

What: The Infant-Parent Program at McMaster Children's Hospital offers an eight-week parenting course for parents of children 12 to 36 months.

When: The course runs Wednesdays from 9 to 11 a.m., starting March 21.

Where: Ontario Early Years Centre, 209 MacNab St. N.

Cost: The course, parking and child care are free.

Contact: For more information or to register, phone Mary at 905-521-2100, ext. 77406.

Heart matters

What: City of Hamilton Public Health Services presents Your Heart Matters: What is Your Risk?, an educational program on heart health for adults 55 years and older.

When: Wednesday, March 14, 6 to 8 p.m.

Where: Sackville Hill Seniors' Recreation Centre, 780 Upper Wentworth St.

Contact: 905-546-3540

Tone your zones



JOHN RENNISON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

THE HAMSTRING PUSHUP: The hamstring pushup is one of the few body-weight exercises that primarily targets the back of the leg. While lying on your back, place the heels of your feet on a bench or chair. Make sure to place your feet in the centre as a chair can flip if you're too close to the edge. Then pull your heels downward into the chair, lifting your hips off the floor until your body is straight. Your knees should remain at a 90-degree angle from start to finish. This exercise is demonstrated by Mark Young of Nutrex Solutions (nutrexolutions.com).