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Dr Bob's Newsletter – November 2004

By Robert Roy MD

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Family Members Should Know Their Family's Medical History

Yes, this is a great time to be sure that you are up to date with your family's history. This includes not only your immediate family but your grand parents and aunts and uncles. This history needs to be updated on a regular interval and then cataloged. Organizing this gives your doctor an upper hand to look for more clues of your susceptibility to any of these diseases.

The US government last week (and very quietly) unveiled a new software that you can use where you enter this information and get a prints out in graphic form a family tree that can help your doctor to assess your risk.

Up to 96% of us know more or less our family history but only 1/3 have tried to catalog. This is according to the CDC. Dr Francis Collins stated last week "family history is central to taking advantage of the new genomic information..". The program is neat and should help your physician.

Here is the site where you can download this for your family:

<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/> Dr Bob's Take: do it, please.

Vitamin E Update

This study has concluded that taking more than 200 international units of vitamin E can worsen your chances of heart disease. Dr Edgar Miller of Johns Hopkins University has analyzed 19 previous studies involving a total of 130,000 people who took vitamin E alone or with other vitamins.

The findings showed that people taking 400 IU or more had a 10 times the risk of dying from heart disease as compared to those taking 200IU or less. Most multivitamins contain about 35 – 40 IU. The benefits of anti-oxidants like vitamin E was first demonstrated in test tubes but never has been seen in scientifically based human studies.

Dr Bob's Take: I have not seen a study in the medical literature which was scientifically sound show that vitamin E prevented heart disease. Initially, when the first studies (test tube) came out that vitamin E was worth taking I was a proponent but as other studies never proved it I told folks not to take them. It may be that anti-oxidants only work if taken from food. (more on that to come)

Fruits and Veggies Update

Here is a very large study over 100,000 participants of which 71,000+ were female and the rest males. It was conducted under the auspices of Dr Walter Willet of the Harvard School of Public Health. The participants answered mailed out questionnaires and the study was following participants from mid 80's until 1998.

The outcome showed that if participants ate five or more servings of fruit and vegetables per day there risk heart disease was slightly decreased but it did not show any effect on cancer reduction that was statistically significant.

There were several ideas about why fruits and vegetables did not provide a cancer decrease including that the protective mechanism may take longer to see an effect or that the individuals studied ate more fruits and vegetables normally. The participants included health professionals primarily.

Dr Bob's Take: this was a large study and I believe does show that eating more fruits and vegetables does have some heart protection. I do not believe this should be considered that the end of the controversy over the effects on cancer reduction.

Omega 3 Fish Oil – New Claims

Coming in a fish counter near you. Yes, you heard me right. The FDA has issued a new label that can be added to certain fish that contain Omega 3 oil. It basically states that research has shown that these oils MAY reduce the risk of coronary disease (hardening of the arteries). The amount of the oil will also be given on the label.

Dr Bob's Take: Yes, it well known that certain fish like lake trout, salmon and tuna, have significant amount of the omega 3 oils and these are good for us. Olive oil is also another oil that is beneficial.

Cholesterol – How Low Shall We Go

There has been a great deal of discussion in medical circles about the current published target for our cholesterol levels (see below). We are now seeing that there is more improvement noted if the cholesterol total is below 200mg.

Of other significance are the levels of LDL (bad cholesterol) and HDL (good cholesterol). We are seeing more evidence that the lower the LDL goes the better off we are. Once again it is important that you know your own levels and what the current normals should be. Here are the current recommendations from the American Heart Association (AHA).

Risk Total Cholesterol LDL (bad cholesterol) HDL (good cholesterol)

desireable at or below 200mg at or below 129mg 40 – 50mg male 50 – 60mg female
moderate risk 200 – 239 mg 100 – 129 mg below 40 male & female
high risk 240mg and above 130 – 159mg = borderline 160 – 189mg = high 190mg or more = very high
below 40

Dr Bob' Take: I am a firm believer of the science that states we are what we eat and where we are from. We have both genetics and food that represent our cholesterol. It is very important for all of us to get within the goals of the treatment regimen set up by your physician. The final goals are not written yet but will be over the next several years. Here is a "Heart Profiler" that you may find useful from the AHA.

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1516>

NEW NEWS Potential Warning with Bextra

On Nov 10th there was a suggestion by the FDA that there may be some unwanted cardiac events with this medication. This medication is another "cox2" meds which is somewhat similar to Vioxx. There was small study where Bextra was given intra-venously and then followed with oral Bextra where the death rate was higher than it should have been.

Dr Bob's Take: it is too early to have a definitive call on this but I would err on the side of caution.

I have several websites, physician-on-health.com and orchids-plus-more.com. A physician by training with 20 yr expereince as a family doc. Developing these websites has been an interest for many years.

Cr Bob's Newsletter – December, 2004

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-----Topics-----

#1 Don't Ignore High Blood Pressure – Do You Know Yours?

#2 Anti-Oxidants, An Update

#3 Baby Teeth –Pacifiers and Thumb Sucking

#4 Tablet Splitting

#5Grape Juice and Cholesterol

High Blood Pressure And You

Did you know that nearly two thirds, yes

66% of Americans under sixty have or are on the verge of high blood pressure and at least 1/3 do not know it. Having this "**silent killer**" not only increases their risk of heart disease or stroke but puts them in a higher risk category for hospitalization and death according to a recent study.

There are new guidelines for high blood pressure that have been agreed upon over the last several years and you need to know about them. First the new guidelines are that normal blood pressure is when the systolic (top number) is 119 or lower and the bottom number is 79 or less. In the recent past we felt that abnormal blood pressure was anything that was 140 or above over 90 or above. Now, people who have this are definitely hypertensive or have high blood pressure.

When the reading is 120 – 139 for the systolic and / or 80 – 89 for the diastolic we are to be considered "pre–hypertension. Each of needs to know what our blood pressure reading is, so don't be shy, ask your doctor.

Also, it makes good sense that if your blood pressure is not normal get a blood pressure cuff in the drug store and have your spouse, partner or children take it periodically and jot down the numbers for your doctor. There is such a diagnosis of "white coat" syndrome" where blood pressure rises when you go to the doctors office.

Dr Bob's Take: It is so important to know what your blood pressure is and if it is pre–hypertensive or in the

category of high blood pressure (hypertensive) get it treated and you can make a dramatic difference in your life.

Anti–Oxidant Update

Last month we talked about Vitamin E and the potential for increasing the risk for heart disease. Initially when the first studies came out about 10–15 years ago it was felt that Vitamin E was going to be a panacea for "preventing" heart disease.

Well, there are more studies that are being released which is showing that the herbal remedies that are being touted as anti–oxidants are not proving very effective in preventing diseases like cancer. These are substances like beta carotene, vitamin C, and selenium. The researchers in France have been looking at this and have concluded that there may be a small benefit for men (none for women) but that the **benefits can easily be derived by eating a balanced diet.** This study was recently reported in the November issue of Archives of Internal Medicine.

Dr Bob's Take: as an American I like you are looking for the "holy grail" which in the US is "take a pill and cure it" is not the answer here. We need to really eat right and exercise and this will lead to a healthy "us".

Pacifiers and Baby's Teeth

A study in the Archives of Disease in

Children this month, shows that there is a difference in the formation of "baby teeth" when a baby breast feeds or uses their thumb to suck or is given a pacifier during the first 3 months of their life. The study took place in Italy with 1000 children aged 3–5 years old. It found that 1/3 of all children who used pacifiers or sucked their thumb had malocclusion, where the teeth did not line up properly. 89% of had an open bite, where the front teeth do not meet. Whereas only 11% of those with an open bite were breast fed.

This study took place when the children

were 3–5 years old and based on information about how they were fed and the use of pacifiers or thumbs. It also is based on the 1st set of teeth – the baby teeth. It is felt by the researchers that the pattern for the teeth is set by how the 1st set is treated.

Dr Bob's Take: although this may

have quite a bit of significance for our children's future and their biting and chewing abilities I don't see many of us changing what we are doing or what we have done. But, you know the orthodontists will continue to flourish.

Prescription Tablet Splitting

Some of you may have remembered the

articles in the papers about 3 years ago when it was suggested by some health plans that members cut their tablets in half with some medications. Well in Florida a pharmacist has noted that with cholesterol lowering medication a savings of about \$850 could be saved per year by splitting the tablet. He goes on to say that this is one way to fight some of the escalation in prices for medications. It was found that with patients of the Veterans Affairs Dept there

was a savings of \$46 million when eligible patients split their Zocor.

Dr Bob's Take: before you go

and do this you first need to check with your doctor. Bring in a sample of the medication so he/she can judge whether or not it would be wise to split the tablet.

Grape Juice and Cholesterol

Yes, the studies are in, grape juice does

have a positive effect on raising the HDL part of cholesterol. Dr Jane Freedman, associate professor of Pharmacology at Boston University studied a group of 17 men and 3 women with a grant from Welch's. The participants were 63 years old on average and were 2 weeks on the juice, off for 2 weeks than given a placebo (non-juice) for another 2 weeks.

The outcome showed that the grape juice

drinkers elevated their HDL on average from 45 to 50mg, about a 10% rise. This group also lowered a chemical in their system that shows the presence of

inflammation in the blood vessels. It is felt that yes grape juice can work like red wine in humans. And **for those who don't drink red wine there is an alternative.**

With that good news I will close for this year and talk with you again next year.

Happy New Year everyone!

I have several websites, physician-on-health.com and orchids-plus-more.com. A physician by training with 20 yr experience as a family doc. Developing these websites has been an interest for many years.

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Politics in New Jersey

Online Holiday Shopping Sales Meet Record Breaking Expectations

Another day, another newsletter to write...

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