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Earning Your Longevity

Why Working Longer May Help You Live Longer

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

If you think retiring and saying goodbye forever to workday stress will improve your health, you're wrong. A recent study showed individuals who opted for full retirement experienced a 23 percent increase in difficulty performing daily activities, an 11 percent decline in mental health, and an eight percent increase in illness, compared to those who continued to work at least part time.

The Okinawans, the healthiest and longest lived people in the world, literally do not have a word for "retirement" in their language. As these people age they may change what they do, but they never completely retire. In essence, the more engaged you are with people, the healthier you are likely to be; and work tends to promote connections with others, as well as a sense of mission.

Be a Work in Progress

Life is never static; it tends to be either in the growth mode or decay mode. When we lose our drive, settle back, and aimlessly coast along, our physical and mental powers begin to atrophy. Work can motivate us to acquire new skills and knowledge, which helps ensure we will never stop growing.

A job that requires you to use your body and your brain can keep you youthful. Studies show there are four essential components to staying healthy later in life: social connectedness, mental stimulation, physical activity, and a healthy diet. Continuing to work, even if it's part time or volunteer work, can help you make the first three happen.

No doubt, age takes a toll on some brain functions like reaction time, ability to multi-task, and short-term memory, but the latest research indicates that some brain functions actually improve with age. Decades of real life experiences instill a wisdom you can't find in a book and teach us how to be more efficient in solving problems. You don't need to reinvent the wheel each time when you have seen it all before. In a profession like cardiology, this can be invaluable.

Robert Conn, M.D., is one of the senior partners at Cardiovascular Consultants and is a long-time favorite mentor of mine. His legendary knowledge and skills in the diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular disease have been honed during 50 years of caring for patients.

Like Dr. Conn, people today are living longer and more productive lives. Your community needs your



Dr. Robert Conn's vast experience is invaluable in caring for his patients.

talents, time, and wisdom as much as you need the emotional and financial perks from continued employment.

I was speaking to an acquaintance who recently retired and I asked him, "Do you miss your work?" He replied, "Like a headache! I realized I was getting to know more and more about less and less. I decided I had better retire before I knew everything about nothing." He is now volunteering at a local grade school, taking classes at community college, and spending hours exploring the internet, and planning upcoming trips.

Working longer is not always the path to better health, especially if your work is monotonous, stressful and/or not intellectually stimulating or emotionally fulfilling. However, even if you retire from your primary occupation, find something to do that will present new challenges. Activities that offer you the chance to develop a sense of control and mastery are revitalizing for heart and soul, and can fortify your immune system. ❤️

Slash Your Healthcare Costs

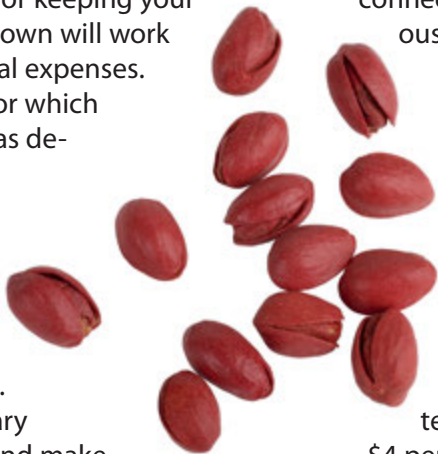
How to Keep Your Money and Your Health

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

Out-of-pocket medical costs went up more than 100 percent between 2000 and 2005, while wages grew only 18 percent. A survey published in the November 2006 *Money* magazine, stated that 35 percent of Americans report rising costs have caused them to cut back on needed healthcare by doing things like skipping doctor visits, or failing to refill their prescriptions. Being forced to choose either sound health or financial security is unfair, unacceptable, and unnecessary. By investing a little time and energy into learning how to "shop for value" when spending your healthcare dollar, you can cut thousands of dollars from your medical care costs and end up healthier as well. Here are 11 ways to start cutting your healthcare costs today:

1. AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE:

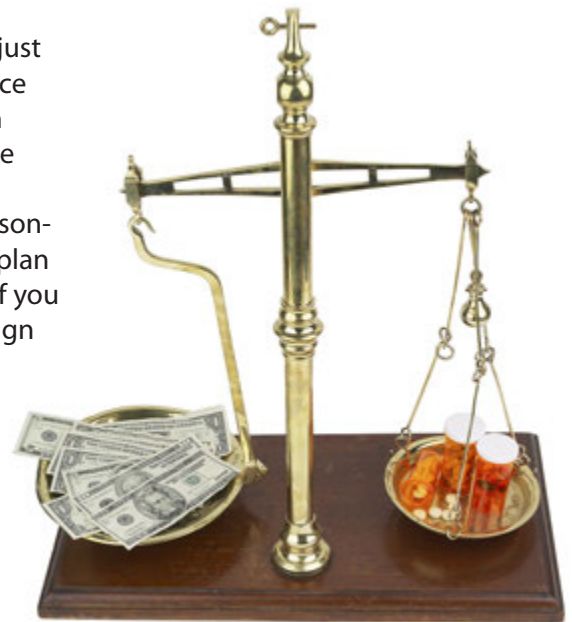
The same formula for keeping your car expenses down will work for your medical expenses. Burn the fuel for which your engine was designed (hint: it should come straight from nature, like water, nuts, vegetables, fruits, and fish). Do the necessary maintenance and make sure you know your numbers (blood pressure, cholesterol, waist measurement, blood sugar) and make sure they are in the ideal ranges.



2. CHOOSE WISELY: Don't just opt for the path of least resistance when signing up for your health plan. Make sure your doctors are going to be "in network," your deductibles and co-pays are reasonable, and the prescription drug plan is compatible with your needs. If you are 65 or older, make sure you sign up for Medicare Part D. Most of our Medicare patients are saving thousands of dollars each year in prescription drugs. The so-called donut hole in Medicare D can be a problem. However, excellent generic options are becoming available for most of the cardiovascular drugs.

3. ASK FOR SAMPLES: If you are having a hard time paying for your brand name prescription medications, make sure you let us know and we can often help by providing you with free samples and/or getting you connected to programs generously sponsored by the pharmaceutical companies which provide free or deeply discounted prescription drugs.

4. ASK FOR GENERICS: Generic medications are usually dramatically less expensive than brand name counterparts; many are now only \$4 per month. This typically translates into yearly savings of about \$1,000 for a single prescription. Check with your doctor to find out if the drug you need has an acceptable generic option.



5. CONSIDER SPLITTING PILLS: Many prescription drugs these days are so-called "flat" priced. For example, the price of Crestor, a popular and effective cholesterol-lowering drug, is approximately \$80 per month for the 10 mg, 20 mg and 40 mg tablets. This means that by asking for the 40 mg Crestor tablet and splitting it in quarters, you can cut your cost for this medication by 75 percent, if you are paying out of pocket.

6. SHOP AROUND: The prices on prescription drugs vary widely from one pharmacy to the next. Call a sampling of pharmacies in your area to get a price quote for your prescriptions. The best prices are sometimes found at large discounters such as Costco and Wal-Mart, but frequently your own neighborhood pharmacy may be as economical and more convenient. Or, if you can, get 90-day prescriptions; usually the costs are substantially less.

7. REDUCE YOUR STRESS:

Experts estimate that between 60 to 90 percent of diseases are, at least in part, related to stress. Try to “chill out” a bit. Exercise at least 30 minutes a day, get out and get some fresh air, take a yoga class, dance to music, watch a sunrise or sunset with a loved one, take a vacation, or just slow down and be grateful for your blessings. Work naps into your schedule. A large recent study showed by napping for about 30 minutes at least three times weekly, you can cut your risk of dying from cardiovascular disease by 30 percent.

8. KICK THE HABIT: On average, cigarettes cost \$4.35 a pack, adding up to almost \$1,500 per year for the average smoker. That is just the tip of the iceberg. By smoking, you will likely encounter \$1,600 a year more in healthcare costs, with a 10 percent surcharge on homeowners insurance and a 300 percent increase in individual life insurance costs. It has never been easier to quit smoking

than in 2007. A revolutionary new drug by the name of Chantix, is now available. This prescription medication blocks the nicotine receptors in the brain, thus eliminating the cravings for cigarettes. You will still need to make up your mind that it is finally your time to quit. When you do, Chantix will greatly improve your chances of being successful. Just think of all the money you will save in the long run (not to mention the years of vigorous life you will be adding).

9. FLOSS DAILY. It’s amazing how important a healthy smile is to your overall health. When my kids ask if they need to floss all their teeth, I tell them, “No, just the ones you want to keep.”

10. FOLLOW DOCTOR’S ORDERS: About 50 percent of all



patients do not follow precisely the instructions about taking their medications; and this has been estimated to account for up to 10 percent of all hospitalizations. In addition to your doctors and nurses, your local pharmacist is a valuable resource to ensure that you are taking your medications properly.

11. TAKE OWNERSHIP IN YOUR HEALTH: By far, the single best way to save thousands of dollars on your health bills is to focus on taking care of yourself. By paying close attention to your own habits and overall health, and taking real ownership interest in these issues, you will dramatically improve your long-term wellness, while reducing your healthcare costs. ❤️

Paul Harvey on Appreciating Life

Happiness is not the quite the same as pleasure. Happiness usually involves an element of struggle, or endurance, and ultimately some accomplishment. Paul Harvey addressed this theme in a letter to his grandkids.

“We tried so hard to make things better for our kids that we made them worse. For my grandchildren, I’d like better. I’d really like for them to know about hand-me-down clothes. I hope you learn humility by being humiliated, and that you learn honesty by being cheated. I hope you learn to make your own bed, mow the lawn and wash the car. And I really hope nobody gives you a brand new car when you are 16. It will be good if at least one time you can see puppies born and your old dog put to sleep. I hope you get a black eye fighting for something you believe in. I hope you have to share a bedroom with your younger sibling. I hope you have to walk uphill to school with your friends and that you live in a town where you can do it safely. I hope you learn to dig in the dirt and read books.

When you learn to use computers, I hope you also learn to add and subtract in your head. May you skin your knee climbing a mountain, burn your hand on a stove and stick your tongue on a frozen flagpole. I sure hope you make time to sit on a porch with your Grandma or Grandpa and go fishing with your Uncle. May you feel sorrow at a funeral and joy during the holidays. These things I wish for you—tough times and disappointment, hard work and happiness. To me, it’s the only way to appreciate life.” ❤️

Make Time for Exercise

How and Why Your Cardiologists Do!

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

We are always telling you about the importance of exercise for improving your health and specifically reducing the risk of heart disease. Fitting it into our hectic daily schedules, however, is difficult for many people. The latest studies show that two out of three Americans are not regularly active, and this is a major problem.

Like many of our patients, doctors are very busy people. We usually start our days before the sun comes up, and often don’t get home until it is dark. Our days are typically filled with important appointments that have been booked weeks and sometimes, months in advance. Additionally, unscheduled situations arise requiring our attention throughout the day. Still, the cardiologists at Cardiovascular Consultants tend to be pretty darned good at not just “talking the talk, but also walking the walk” when it comes to fitness. Here is some advice from our own Cardiovascular Consultants doctors about how and why they make time for their daily exercise.

Richard Moe, M.D., has been exercising every morning since he was diagnosed with high blood pressure as a 21-year-old-student. Dr. Moe says the chronic health problems we tend to get are often life-long issues. When his patients ask how often they have to exercise, he responds by saying, “Just on the days when you are stressed, or overweight, or obese, or have high blood pressure, or high cholesterol, or diabetes, or heart disease.” For most Americans, this means we need

to exercise every day. Exercise has the power to revolutionize our health and vitality like nothing else can. Many of us who exercise do so first thing in the morning, even though it means we have to roll out of bed a bit earlier. Dr. Moe finds that an early morning workout is the only way he can predictably exercise everyday. He also finds that he feels generally better during the day if he has exercised that morning.

Working out first thing in the morning assures that you will get your fitness activity done before the rest of the world wakes up and has a chance to start harassing you with obligations. As an added perk, you won’t have that nagging guilt about exercising hanging over your head for the rest of the day. If you wait until after work, many people feel too tired, hungry, or emotionally exhausted to muster the energy it takes to overcome their inertia. My wife, Joan, has figured out that she doesn’t allow herself the luxury of her morning shower until her exercise is done.

Keep it Simple

Most of the Cardiovascular Consultants doctors who exercise daily do it right in their own neighborhoods or homes. An ideal exercise program involves pulling on your workout shoes and clothes, and walking out your front door to get some fresh air and activity.

Robert Conn, M.D., shuns morning workouts, but has developed a habit of “forced late afternoon exercise.” Even when he comes



Dr. Skolnick works exercise into his daily routine by walking his children to school.

home from work feeling unmotivated or fatigued, he has learned to force himself to workout. “After the first several minutes of forced exercise I discover renewed energy and vitality. I finish the workout with zeal, and it wakes me up, shakes off my lethargy and allows me to be more productive and enthused for the rest of the evening. I find that the older I get, the more important this exercise-induced energy boost becomes.”

David Skolnick, M.D., always thought of himself as more of an “academic than a jock” while growing up in Pittsburgh, Penn.; so regular exercise didn’t come naturally to him. Yet, he couldn’t help but notice that his patients who exercised regularly were more vigorous, looked and felt better, and were much easier to keep alive and healthy than those who weren’t exercising. So now he stays fit and trim by walking frequently, including walks with his kids to their school on many mornings. He even makes it over to the gym before work a couple times a week. When he

began there, a fitness trainer asked him what his goals were. Dr. Skolnick replied: "I just want to live longer."

On the other hand, Anthony Magalski, M.D., has always been something of a jock—and as the Kansas City Chiefs' cardiologist he's even a physician for jocks. His daily workout includes strength training, like pull ups and weight lifting, as well as aerobic exercise, like running or swimming. He prefers exercising after work, often at a 24-Hour Fitness club near his home. He regularly does interval training, which involves repeated cycles of maximal effort for about 30 to 60 seconds followed by one or three minutes of recovery. Dr. Magalski says, "When you stop doing the hard things, life doesn't get easier; the easy things just become hard." By the way, if you are thinking about doing interval training, let us check you out first.

Michael Hajdu, M.D., also exercises after work, and indeed science shows that the late afternoon is predictably the time of the day when your body is most ready for exercise, even if your mind might not be. Your muscles are stretched



Dr. Huber, left, and his brother, Peter, right, climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro recently.

out, your fuel tank is full, and your hormones are in their ideal ranges for physical exertion. Dr. Hajdu says, "I couldn't run four miles even if I was being chased by a rabid pit bull!" But he does love to bicycle, hike, and plan adventures, like bicycling across entire states, or hiking into and out of the Grand Canyon. In fact, Dr. Hajdu is planning to cycle 1,000 miles across the northern Great Plains this summer. He says, "Hey, if I don't train, I am literally going to drop dead on the side of a Nebraska road sometime in mid-July!" Ken Huber, M.D., president of Cardiovascular Consultants, also likes to plan adventure vacations. Last year he

climbed the tallest peak in Africa, Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Another of our doctors, Mike Zabel, M.D., recently qualified for the Boston Marathon and will run it on April 16, 2007.

What if you can't seem to drag yourself out of bed in the morning to exercise, and find you're too tired to get it done after work? A refreshing exercise session over the lunch hour just may be your ticket to fitness. Get out for a 30-minute brisk walk over the noon hour, and you can still have time to eat a light and healthy lunch. Exercise in the middle of the day is not just convenient, but also invigorating. Studies show that a 30 to 60-minute workout at lunchtime lowers stress, improves productivity, and leaves you happier for the rest of the day. I personally find this to be my favorite time to exercise, and do it whenever I get the chance. So, if I seem a little flushed and sweaty at your early afternoon appointment, please forgive me. I like to think of life as a grand adventure that I need to train for in order to fully appreciate all of its beauty and opportunity. ❤️

Keeping Your Joints Healthy

It is much easier to maintain an active lifestyle and a vigorous and strong heart if your joints and muscles stay healthy. However, sore muscles and aching joints are among the most common complaints we hear from our patients. Most people resort to prescription pain relievers, or high doses of agents such as ibuprofen or naproxen; all of which just mask the pain and can be dangerous.

Instead, I suggest that you concentrate on using a natural approach to make your musculoskeletal system healthier. When walking or running, try to choose softer surfaces such as dirt, grass or gravel. Additionally, try to include some non-jarring aerobic exercises such as swimming, cycling, or gliding on an elliptical trainer. Incorporating strength training (such as weight lifting) and stretching (such as yoga) into your weekly routine will also help to keep your muscles and joints strong and supple.

Safe and effective natural supplements can also improve vigor and resiliency of your joints and muscles. The combination of omega-3, about two capsules twice daily, Glucosamine/Chondroitin, one capsule twice daily, and Vitamin D, 2,000 IU daily, helps to reduce inflammation, lubricate the joints, and reduce muscle pain. The average American adult is deficient in these important and natural compounds and supplementing these levels back into the ideal ranges will often improve not just pain, but also the health of the joints and muscles. ❤️

Alcohol and Cardiovascular Health

The Razor-Sharp, Double-Edged Sword

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

“It has long been recognized that the problems with alcohol relate not to the use of bad things, but to the abuse of a good thing.”

Abraham Lincoln

Alcohol is analogous to the proverbial double-edged sword; and no other health factor is capable of cutting so deeply in either direction depending upon how it is used. Science shows that light-to-moderate drinking done on a daily basis improves cardiovascular health and substantially reduces risk of death. On the other hand, excessive alcohol intake and/or “binge” drinking is toxic to the heart and overall health, and is the third leading cause of premature death among Americans.

Missouri’s own Harry Truman, one of the healthiest and longest-lived of the U.S. presidents, started off each day, before his morning walk, with his one daily drink—a shot of bourbon whiskey. Now, I am not suggesting that you start your day with an “eye opener,” but it is quite likely that his drinking pattern contributed to his

exceptional vigor and longevity. The developing scientific consensus indicates that the specific alcoholic beverage you drink is less important than the quantity of alcohol and the pattern of intake. Having one drink daily (or up to two drinks daily for men) appears to be the ideal drinking pattern for improving cardiovascular health. Some studies suggest that wine, particularly red wine, might be the healthiest form of alcohol; but most studies show equal protection from any alcoholic beverage. It is the alcohol (ethanol) itself, rather than any other specific component of the wine, beer or spirits, that is the major factor in conferring health benefits. Alcohol reduces fats and sugar in the



bloodstream and decreases inflammation, but only temporarily—for about 12 to 24 hours. This is probably why drinking a small amount five to seven days a week is more heart healthy than just occasional alcohol use. So alcohol intake, like exercise, is best done daily and in moderation. From a health standpoint, a drink immediately before or during your evening meal is ideal. However, avoid drinking within three or four hours before bedtime, because alcohol can disturb your deep, restorative sleep and/or worsen sleep apnea.

Doctors Know the Score

In the *American Journal of Cardiology* the Mid America Heart Institute recently published a study of 800 U.S. cardiovascular physicians that showed about three out of four drank alcohol regularly, with nearly half of those consuming one or two drinks a day; suggesting that American cardiologists personally recognize the potential health benefits of regular alcohol intake. However, nearly all studies evaluating the health effects of alcohol report a J-shaped curve, whereby light to moderate drinking confers health benefits, but increasingly heavy drinking results in progressive worsening of cardiovascular and overall health. A recent study of over one million people showed that one drink daily for women, or one or two drinks daily for men, was linked to an 18 percent lower death rate during follow up. In that same study, more than two drinks daily in women, or more than three drinks daily in men, increased risk of death in a dose-dependent fashion.

Reduce Your Risks for Other Diseases

Light to moderate drinking lowers risk of heart attack and cardiac death by approximately 30 to 35 percent, which for example, is about as much as we see with the powerful statin cholesterol drugs. A recent study showed that people who were already following all of the four major healthy lifestyle behaviors (not smoking, maintain-

ing a healthy weight, exercising 30 minutes a day, and eating a healthy diet) still received the cardiac benefits of light to moderate drinking. Other studies show that consuming one or two drinks daily reduces the risk of stroke, congestive heart failure, high blood pressure, and even Alzheimer's disease; but again, heavier alcohol intake progressively increases the risk for each of these problems.

A small to moderate dose of alcohol also reduces the risk of diabetes by about 30 percent. Evidence indicates that light to moderate drinking might even be good for weight control, especially for reducing belly fat. People who have one or two drinks a day seem to have less abdominal obesity than do non-drinkers, but those who consume more than two drinks a day have—you guessed it—a larger “beer-gut,” which expands in proportion to the amount of alcohol consumed.

Although Mark Twain once quipped, “Everything in moderation, including moderation,” in fact even occasional immoderate drinking is bad for your health. Regular drinking is a slippery slope that many individuals cannot safely navigate; and let's be clear, getting drunk on Saturday night is not heart healthy. Binge drinking, defined as more than five drinks per drinking day, increases the risk of heart attack and other problems like motor vehicle accidents, stroke, dangerous heart rhythms, sudden death, suicide, cancer, liver disease, and death from all causes. Some studies suggest that alcohol abuse and binge drinking are on the rise, and alcohol abuse is currently the third largest preventable cause of death, killing more than 100,000 Americans each year.

Drink Responsibly

So, if you drink alcohol responsibly, you can take heart in the knowledge that it is good for your health. If you are considering taking up alcohol for its heart benefits, make sure you keep your intake to not more than one drink a day if you are a woman, and not more than two drinks a day if you are a man. **Keep in mind that a drink is considered 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof spirits.** If in the past you have had problems with abuse of alcohol or other substances, or if you smoke or have a history of depression, or have moral or religious objections to



“My doctor says one glass of wine a day is good for me, so that's my limit!”

alcohol use, or have chronic health issues like liver disease that make alcohol use more dangerous, you should avoid alcohol use altogether. As always, it is a good idea to discuss issues or questions about alcohol with us when you come in for your visit. ❤️

Foundation ASPIRES to Detect Heart Disease

While prevention is the first priority in avoiding heart disease, it is important that cardiologists have access to the most advanced diagnostic tools when heart disease does occur. Cardiovascular Consultants, together with Saint Luke's Hospital and Cardiovascular Imaging Technologies, has formed a new research Foundation (ASPIRE) that will focus on using new, non-invasive imaging modalities to determine when a heart attack might occur.

It is well understood that heart attacks and strokes result from fatty deposits on the interior walls of arteries, better known as plaques. When these plaques become inflamed and rupture, they can lead to clot formations that can block the blood and oxygen supply to the heart or brain. A problem for cardiologists has always been how to identify where plaques exist, and what makes some of them rupture, while others may remain stable for decades or more.

The ASPIRE Foundation will begin to study this question by using an advanced form of Computed Tomography (CT) that images the heart faster than existing scanners, and can begin to provide information on the molecular make up of plaques. This study may yield valuable insight in understanding this process. By being better able to locate and determine vulnerable plaques from stable ones, more effective treatment may be possible. For example the stability of a plaque may be altered by drug therapy, and this technology may allow more accurate measurement of changes in the plaque resulting from different medicines. If the plaques or other characteristics of the vessels as seen by CT require immediate attention, this imaging machine gives us a precise picture of the arteries and whether or not they need to be fixed with stents or bypass surgery. ❤️

Breast Cancer Therapy and Heart Disease

Why Effective Treatment May Pose a Risk to Your Heart

By Tracy Stevens, M.D.

Great strides are being made in successfully treating breast cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, deaths from breast cancer are down, and treatment can even be custom tailored to the type of tumor cells a patient has.



Unfortunately, some of these treatments have been associated with negative side effects on the heart.

For example, radiation therapy to the chest area, especially in the past, caused a “stiffness” and restricted the heart muscle’s function. It also caused a constriction in the sack around the heart, called the pericardium. These side effects can cause a type of congestive heart failure that is challenging to treat.

Chest radiation also has been linked to heart valve damage and coronary artery blockages.

Adriamycin, a type of chemotherapy drug referred to as anthracycline therapy, can cause a dose-related weakening of the heart

muscle that also may cause congestive heart failure.

One of the newest chemotherapy drugs used to treat breast cancer, Herceptin (Trastuzumab), is often started after the patient completes Adriamycin chemotherapy. While Herceptin has been effective at treating breast cancer, it too, has been associated with weakening of the heart muscle.

Before a patient begins treatment for breast cancer, we advise a

thorough baseline cardiac evaluation, including history, physical examination and assessment of the heart’s function by echocardiogram or MUGA scan. This should be followed by regular assessments of the heart’s function throughout treatment.

In a nutshell, a patient undergoing breast cancer treatment needs to work closely with both her oncologist and her cardiologist to be certain she receives the most effective breast cancer therapy, without causing damage to her heart.

Fortunately, recent studies report that most women who develop congestive heart failure side effects while undergoing treatment for breast cancer with Herceptin, will recover their heart strength when the drug is withheld or discontinued. ❤️

Heart Failure: Prevention to Best Treatment

Heart failure is a progressive disease that affects nearly five million Americans of all ages and is responsible for more hospitalizations in those older than 65 than any other condition. To learn more about heart failure, please attend one of the following free educational programs offered by Saint Luke’s Health System and Cardiovascular Consultants. Registration is available by calling NurseLine at (816)932-6220. ❤️

Saint Luke’s South Hospital
Wellness Conference Room
Thursday, April 12, 2007, 10 a.m.
Presenter: Stephanie Lawhorn M.D.,
cardiologist/heart failure specialist

Saint Luke’s Hospital-Plaza Location
Embassy Suites, 220 West 43rd Street, Kansas City
Wednesday, April 18, 2007, 10 a.m.
Presenter: Anthony Magalski M.D.,
cardiologist/heart failure specialist

Saint Luke’s East-Lee’s Summit Hospital
Conference Rooms A and B
Monday, April 16, 2007, 7 p.m.
Presenter: Andrew Kao M.D.,
cardiologist/heart failure specialist

Saint Luke’s Northland Hospital
5844 Barry Road Medical Building
1st Floor Conference Rooms
Monday, April 23, 2007, 7 p.m.
Presenter: Tracy Stevens M.D.,
cardiologist/heart failure specialist

The Coated Stent Controversy

What Patients Should Do About Taking Plavix

When coated stents (also known as drug-eluting stents) were first released onto the U.S. market in 2002, they were hailed as one of the most significant advances ever for the treatment of heart disease. However, recent studies, which have been widely reported in the mass media, have raised questions regarding the safety of drug-eluting stents. Many of our patients are confused about these issues; here is what you need to know about drug-eluting stents.

Stents are small metal coils that look quite similar in size and shape to the spring in your ballpoint pen. These stents are slipped over a wire to straddle a blockage in the artery. Once in position, a balloon is used to expand the stent and push the plaque, or blockage, out of the center of the artery, leaving the stent behind as a scaffold to hold the vessel open. Stents generally work much better than a balloon alone for opening blocked arteries. However, scar tissue can form inside of the stent that can cause the artery to close up again. Drug-eluting stents have a coating of a drug that helps to prevent scar tissue from growing inside the stent.

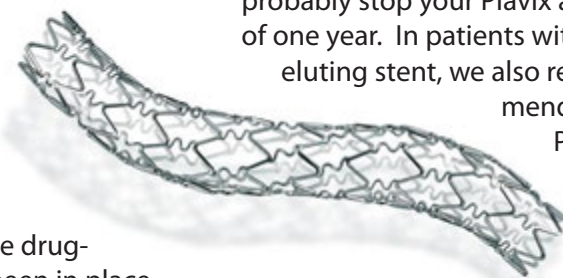
Studies show that if we place an old-fashioned bare metal stent in 100 patients, about 25 of these stents will re-narrow significantly due to overgrowth of scar tissue (restenosis) during the first six to 12 months after the procedure. On the other hand, if we place a drug-eluting stent in 100 patients, only about five will re-narrow. This means when we use coated stents, the arteries are much more likely to stay open in the long run, and the patient

is much less likely to need further procedures to re-open the vessels.

The current controversy arose from studies suggesting that coated stents are more likely to suddenly close off due to the development of a blood clot (thrombosis) after the drug-eluting stents have been in place for a year or longer. This problem is less common, but more serious than gradual re-narrowing of the stent.

When a clot suddenly closes off an artery at the site of the stent, it frequently causes a heart attack. Thus, although this sudden stent clotting is rare, it is still a serious concern. Studies suggest that this risk of stent clotting goes away within a few months with a bare metal stent, but the risk persists for at least a year, and maybe as long as two or three years after placing a drug-eluting stent.

Much information about this risk is still in question, and the stent manufacturers are continuing to improve the devices. In the meanwhile, the cardiologists at Cardiovascular Consultants have concluded that patients should stay on their aspirin and Plavix (antiplatelet drugs, to prevent abnormal clotting) for a minimum of one year after a drug-eluting stent is placed. No elective procedure should be performed during this first year (unless it can be performed while the patient is taking aspirin and Plavix). We also recommend that most patients remain on Plavix longer than one year if possible, until more information is available about the actual risk



of late stent thrombosis. If you have had problems with bleeding or are at increased risk for bleeding, we will probably stop your Plavix at the end of one year. In patients with a drug-eluting stent, we also recom-

mend that once Plavix is stopped, the aspirin dose

should be increased to 325 mg (a full aspirin tablet) daily. For bare metal stents, we continue to recommend a minimum of one month of Plavix.

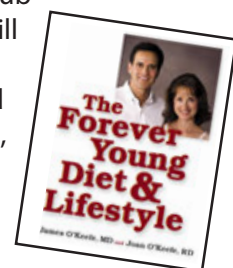
The bottom line is that drug-eluting stents are still highly valuable and safe devices for opening arteries and keeping them open in the long run. However, we do need to continue antiplatelet medications to reduce the risk of sudden clotting for at least one year after a coated stent is placed. ❤️

CardioTabs to Host Forum

CardioTabs will be sponsoring a free public forum this spring, May 14 from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Marriott Hotel on the Country Club Plaza. Speakers will

include James O'Keefe, M.D., and Joan O'Keefe, R.D., authors of the *Forever Young Diet and Lifestyle*. For

more information about the forum or to make your reservation to attend, please call 816-753-4298 or visit www.cardiotabs.com. ❤️



Think Outside the Box!

Natural Cycles Bring Your Life Back into Balance

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

You are related to every other living entity through the complex web of life on Earth. This planet paradise is our one true home and its natural cycles have been intertwined with ours throughout humanity's existence—that is until very recently. Many Americans today have fallen out of step with the natural cycles of our world, leaving them emotionally and physically unwell.

In nature everything is circular and connected. Our perfectly spherical Earth spins around on its axis every 24 hours, and circles the sun every 365 days. Water circulates down from the sky, bringing life to the land and then evaporates back into the sky, being purified in its cycle. In the intricately connected, awe-inspiring cycle of life, plants grow and prosper by using water and sunshine combined with nitrogen and carbon dioxide (both from animal waste products) and the plants reciprocate by giving off the oxygen and growing the vegetables, fruits, seeds, and nuts that we animals need to thrive. Native

human cultures understood that they were part of these cyclical, interconnected rhythms, but our modern, man-made environments have detached many of these vital connections to our natural world.

Today our lives are defined by boxes, not circles. If you are like most Americans, you probably awaken in the box that is your bedroom and get your breakfast from a box. You climb into a box on wheels and go to a larger box, where you work in cubicle, staring at a computer box for much of the day. Then you come back to your box of a home and stare at another box for entertainment. It is time to break out of the box and reconnect with the cycles of nature!

Love Life, and It Will Love You Back!

Winter is the season most dominated by the boxy existence, but the Earth is turning green again as life is reborn in spring. Celebrate your place in this miraculous world by getting outside. Let the warm spring sunshine and fresh air rejuvenate you. Walk or run or cycle around the neighborhood or a nearby park. Starting in March, the sun is high enough in the sky to stimulate the production of Vitamin D in your skin again, and it only takes 15 to 30 minutes to restore your levels back into the ideal ranges that are vitally important for the health of everything from your bones to your heart. Plant a garden or a fruit tree. Food that you grow yourself invigorates your health long before it ever



makes it to your plate. The physical benefits of digging in the earth, and the unique sense of happiness that comes from nurturing other life are benefits you can't get from a pill. Eat fresh plants like fruits, berries, nuts, and veggies, especially the leafy ones. Visit the farmer's market where you will find fresh whole foods, not processed modern fare made from food harvested long ago and far away. Drink pure water and feel its goodness circulate through you and cleanse your system.

Consider sharing your wisdom and mentoring a younger person. Connecting with people from generations older or younger than yours will broaden your perspectives and strengthen ties. Don't let your heart run out of summers; revitalize your existence and reach your full potential by re-synching your biorhythms with the cycles of life. ❤️

"There are only two ways to live your life: one as though nothing is a miracle and the other as though everything is a miracle."

Albert Einstein



Dear Patient,

We have written to you before about our commitment to providing the highest quality medical care for you and for all of our patients. In those letters, we have discussed the challenges we face in maintaining that level of quality under significant financial pressures. Quality is a frequent topic in today's healthcare debates, and that should be a good thing. The problem is, not everyone who uses the word "quality" in healthcare discussions defines the word the same way.

Unfortunately, people with very different agendas sometimes use the word "quality" to advance their own interests and their own points of view. So please take a few moments to read this letter and carefully consider the issues we raise, because these issues will have a significant impact on your access to the best doctors and the best medical technology.

Here is what your doctors at Cardiovascular Consultants mean when we say "quality": We mean providing state-of-the-art cardiovascular care for patients in the Greater Kansas City region. To us, that means assembling **some of the nation's finest doctors** to work together in one practice, using **the most advanced and sophisticated diagnostic and clinical technology**, and making that world-class level of care available to people like you **right here in our hometown**.

To us, it also means maintaining a **commitment to outcomes-related medical research** within our practice, so that our doctors are not just implementing the latest advances in cardiac care, but actually **helping to create those advances**. That makes state-of-the-art care **available to you at the earliest opportunity**, an advantage shared by only a handful of practices across the country.

Others define "quality" very differently. Some health insurance companies, consulting firms and private rating agencies are inappropriately focused on raw numbers. They want to count the number of procedures or tests ordered, or the dollars spent per diagnosis, to produce "report cards" or "quality ratings" for doctors and hospitals.

We believe that any legitimate measure of medical quality should incorporate these elements:

- Measuring systems should be transparent, and open to scrutiny by all.
- Ratings should be based on the achievement of positive outcomes, not merely the avoidance of negative ones, because best outcomes are the true goal of high quality medical care.
- Doctors should be evaluated on issues within their direct control, and the measurement system should be accurate.
- Evaluations should be risk-adjusted. Since we have the best doctors and best treatments in the region, other physicians often refer their most critically ill patients to us for advanced care.

Quality ratings we have seen so far from the insurance industry and other companies **are neither statistically sound nor based on sufficient medical evidence**. Some insurance companies admit the flaws, but say "we have to start somewhere" to rein in rapidly escalating healthcare costs. We agree and work hard to contain costs. We contend, however, that **when it comes to your health, we must start with accurate, meaningful and evidence-based information** that you can apply to your daily healthcare decisions.

You will continue to hear from us in the months to come on important medical issues. Because our doctors are nationally recognized experts in cardiology and in evaluating patient outcomes, policy-makers at both the local and national levels seek our advice and insights on these issues. In our view, it is essential for patients to also have access to that same information and insight, because patients deserve to be fully informed participants in our ongoing national healthcare debate.

In the meantime, you can continue to play an important role in making sure that the highest quality healthcare remains available here in Kansas City, and that true quality is recognized as such.

You can rest assured that we will not compromise our commitment to quality care, or our commitment to keeping you fully informed on developments in the healthcare issues that affect you and your loved ones. Thank you very much for your support.

Sincerely,



Kenneth C. Huber, M.D., President and Executive Medical Director
Cardiovascular Consultants



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Cardiovascular Benefits of Omega-3

An important study published recently in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, concluded that adequate omega-3 intake was associated with a 36 percent decrease in death from coronary artery disease and a 17 percent fall in the risk of death from any cause. This Harvard study also concluded that omega-3 fats are important for optimal brain health. This study, like previous information, suggested that the optimal dose for cardiovascular benefit is at least 500 mg to 1000 mg of EPA plus DHA per day. DHA appears to be the most cardioprotective and a recent study showed that DHA was more effective at lowering triglycerides than was EPA.

When you get your omega-3 from eating fish, such as salmon for instance, you will receive more DHA than EPA. On the other hand, most fish oil is higher in EPA than DHA. The CardioTabs Omega-3 is unique in that it is highly concentrated and especially rich in DHA. The concentration of DHA in CardioTabs Omega-3 is approximately four times as high as that noted in standard fish oil.

The FDA has advised pregnant women to limit their seafood intake during pregnancy due to concerns about potential contamination with mercury and pesticides. However, a study published in February 2007 in the *Lancet* found that women who consumed at least two or three fish meals per week had children who demonstrated improved I.Q., social behavior, and communication skills as measured during the first eight years of life, compared to women who did not eat fish. The authors concluded that the risks of mercury and pesticides in the fish were outweighed by the benefits of omega-3. Other recent studies have shown that increased omega-3 appears to improve mood and brain function, as well as reduce risk of sudden cardiac death in adults.

The optimal dose of CardioTabs Omega-3 is two to three capsules daily. These are enteric coated, highly purified fish oil capsules, providing you with the benefits of pure omega-3, without any concerns about mercury or pesticide contamination. 

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