



For the Heart

Your Newsletter from Saint Luke's Cardiovascular Consultants

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We're on Each Others' Team* *Song title by Lorde*

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D., with Joan O'Keefe, R.D.

Miracle on Madison Avenue

Is there a doctor in the taxi?

Sarah, who lives in Manhattan, N.Y., went into labor in the late afternoon on a recent Monday. Her husband, Joel, was at work, so he called his brother, Michael, a fourth-year medical student, to accompany Sarah during the cab ride to the hospital. Sarah's labor was progressing at light speed, while the rush-hour traffic on Madison Avenue slowed to a crawl. Sarah tried to be stoic, but the pain was becoming unbearable.

They were on 55th Street and Mount Sinai was still a long way off at 100th Street, so Michael instructed the cabdriver, Osama Hassan, to pull over to the side of the road. Michael opened the car door, and turned the back seat into a makeshift delivery room, while Osama diverted traffic and chased off gawkers.

With just one push from Sarah, baby William arrived amidst the honking chaos



In a New York City cab, Michael Steinhaus delivers his nephew, William, for Sarah the mother.

around him on the streets of New York City. "He's perfect!" Sarah told the reporter from the *New York Daily News*. "I can't believe that I get in a cab and 20 minutes later I'm delivering a baby. I'm not feeling nervous. I'm not feeling modest. I'm not feeling confused. My body is just in the mode," she said.

Michael grew up in Kansas City and is a lifelong friend and classmate of our son Jimmy. Baby William's grandfather, Dr. David

Steinhaus, served as president of Saint Luke's Cardiovascular Consultants for 10 years before taking a job with Medtronic, where he now serves as medical director and vice president.

The surreal story of William's birth highlights some of America's greatest strengths—our sense of national unity despite our remarkable diversity, and our willingness to come together to help others in need.

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We're on Each Others' Team

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"A human being is a part of the whole called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

~ Albert Einstein

Face it—you're a pack animal. Whether or not you realize it, you need your clan and your band of friends around you in order to really thrive. We humans are hard-wired to be highly social beings. Especially your heart and brain need the emotional and physical support of an inner circle—for receiving affection, kindness and compassion, and for giving your love and support to others. The American icon of the lone wolf, the Marlboro man out there conquering the world on his own is a dangerous myth. For virtually all members of the species homo sapiens, a solitary existence is fraught with misery and danger.

A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats

We are living during a pivotal point in human history. Until recent generations, the default human attitude about other people was a tribal view—you're either one of us (an insider) or a stranger (outsider) who is presumed to be an enemy. This ancient and primitive instinct may have been necessary and even effective



Dr. O'Keefe and Joan with several of the people they took shelter with during Hurricane Gonzalo.

in a primeval "kill or be killed" environment. In fact, that outmoded tribal existence was generally a zero sum game ($+1 - 1 = 0$): if one group gained something it was usually the case that the neighboring tribe lost something.

Thankfully, the brain of modern humans has evolved to be more cooperative, trusting, and peaceful, which is necessary for us to flourish in the increasingly global, urban, and interconnected world. In this new, rapidly emerging global age, a rising tide lifts all boats. This can be a win-win game where by pulling together we achieve synergy. In many respects, we are all on the same team already.

Our planet Earth's viability, and even the survival of the human race, will require that we cooperate and rely upon one another, whether we are in China or America, Japan, Germany or Australia, regardless of our religion, occupation, or ethnic

background. When we cooperate and treat others with open-minded respect, we all benefit, economically and socially, enjoying more prosperous, peaceful and connected lives. The math in this evolving new world order is: $1 + 1 + 1 = 4$, just like Sarah, Michael and Osama worked together to make sure William arrived safely.

To be sure, a substantial proportion of people in today's world still view life as a dog-eat-dog existence where nice guys finish last. Yet here's the key: increasingly, the future will belong to creative, hard-working, people who play well with others and respect and embrace diversity, while spending their time and energy making the world a better place. The individuals who do not play by these kinder and gentler rules, who display violent, bigoted, selfish and bullying behaviors will be eventually relegated to the lower rungs of society.

Adversity Can Forge Strong Bonds

Recently, Joan and I returned to the tiny Caribbean island of pristine natural beauty where we spent our honeymoon 30 years ago. A few days after we arrived at Peter Island, Hurricane Gonzalo suddenly formed “out of the blue” and was heading directly toward us. The skies grew ominous, torrential rains began and the palm trees bent sideways under gale-force winds. We scurried to the only storm-proof building on the entire island—a house that normally might comfortably accommodate about 10 people. Once there, we hunkered down with everybody else



who happened to be on the island—some locals and others who were visitors like us, about 70 people in all. As nighttime fell, the electricity went out, plunging the island into total darkness. Behind boarded-up windows we curled up on the floor, bracing for the full force of the 145 mile-per-hour winds from the Category 4 hurricane that was bearing down upon us.

Miraculously, less than an hour before the leading eye wall of the hurricane was expected to slam into Peter Island, Gonzalo suddenly turned northward and raged out into the open Atlantic. By the light of daybreak, we could see the beaches were strewn with debris, but the



Joan and James celebrated their anniversary on Peter Island, in spite of the storm.

little island was largely unscathed. A lovely woman, a resident of the British Virgin Islands who been with us that night, smiled at us with her eyes twinkling and said, “It was the hand of God that pushed that hurricane away from our island. We survived the storm, now we are all family.”

The fondness that Joan and I felt for this paradise before our near-miss with Gonzalo, was only magnified by the bonding experience we had with the other inhabitants of Peter Island that night. Our last five days there turned out to be very memorable and enjoyable because we got to play with 68 of our new best friends from far-flung places like Ireland, Trinidad, California, England, Tortola, Denver, New Zealand, Wisconsin, India and Florida.

Quality Over Quantity A Secret Club with Just Two Members

Morgan, one of my daughter Kathleen’s best friends, reminisced about her grandpa Jake. “My dearest memory of my grandfather is a

simple, yet endearing one. Every time either he or my grandmother walked into or out of a room, all each would do was put their pinky in the air and fold it down as if to say, ‘I love you’ for their hello or goodbye. It truly made my day to see this simple gesture go on every time they saw each other because they didn’t need to say any words to express just how much they loved one another.”

As Jake’s doctor and friend, I am certain that his wife Carolyn’s unconditional love and fierce attention to detail focused on his health, had more to do with his survival than anything his physicians did for him. No matter how ill Jake was—and he literally had nine lives—he recovered and thrived due to the power of his 65-year union with Carolyn. This sustained him until he passed away recently at age 88. Scientific studies show that your inner circle need not be large, even a team of two can be a powerful alliance to help you prevail against life’s inevitable hardships.

“One-hundred years from now it won’t matter what car you drove, what kind of house you lived in, how much money you had in your bank account, nor what your clothes looked like. But what will still be making a difference, echoing down through the generations, is the love you showed to the people in your life.”
~ Unknown

**Any names of patients used in this newsletter have been changed to protect the privacy of these individuals, except in instances where they preferred that we use their real names. For additional copies of the newsletter, or to have your name added or removed from our mailing list, contact Lori Wilson at 816-751-8480 or e-mail: ljwilson@saint-lukes.org.*

Having the Time of Your Life

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D., with Joan O’Keefe, R.D.

We are *so* lucky. There has never been a better time and place to be alive than America in 2015. The standard of living has been increasing for centuries, entertainment options are exploding, and you can safely travel around the world and be treated like royalty.

Unrivaled advantages of modern life include: quality and quantity of food, personal safety, access to information, freedom from persecution for your personal beliefs, effective treatment options for nearly all diseases, unprecedented longevity, and an ability to connect to others—almost anyone, anywhere, anytime.

But let’s be honest, we are getting older. Life expectancy has almost doubled in the past century. Astonishingly, the fastest growing age group in America is the over-80 cohort. Today, in the U.S. the average 65-year-old woman can expect to live to age 89; the average 65-year-old man can expect to live to age 87!

Americans are clearly living longer, in many cases a lot longer than any of us imagined. In essence, you have been handed a priceless gift—an extra 30 years of life. So here are a couple of burning questions to think about: 1) What in the world are you going to do with all that extra time on your hands, and 2) How are you going to stay mentally sharp, physically strong and still be enthused about waking up some morning in January 2045?

“One’s life has just two chapters. Everything that’s happened in the past till now. And the rest of your life starting TODAY.” Jeffrey Piehler, MD (1947-2014).



In Jane Pauley’s book, *Your Life Calling: Reimagining the Rest of Your Life*, she writes, “Frankly, we are all making this up as we go along. But how reassuring to know we’re all in this together.”

Cross My Heart and Hope to Die

Ezekiel Emanuel’s article, “Why I Hope to Die at 75” appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* in September 2014. In it he argues that society, families, and all of us will be better off if nature takes its course swiftly and promptly when a person’s age hits the three-quarters of a century mark.

Emanuel explains: “Seventy-five. That’s how long I want to live. I am sure of my position. Doubtless, death is a loss. It deprives us of experiences and milestones, of time

spent with our spouse and children. But here is a simple truth that many of us seem to resist: living too long is also a loss. It renders many of us, if not disabled, then faltering and declining, a state that may not be worse than death, but is nonetheless deprived. It robs us of our creativity and ability to contribute to work, society, the world. It transforms how people experience us, relate to us, and, most important, remember us. We are no longer remembered as vibrant and engaged, but as feeble, ineffectual, even pathetic.”

Emanuel goes on with his grim perspective, “Over the past 50 years, health care hasn’t slowed the aging process so much as it has slowed the dying process. Americans may live longer than their parents, but they are likely to be more incapacitated. Does that sound very desirable? Living parents make it hard for grown

children to become the patriarch or matriarch. Children need to have enough time for their own lives, out of their parents' shadows."

Precious Golden Years

Emanuel, with his heartless and pessimistic outlook on aging, reminds me of Mr. Grinch. Heck, using his cold-blooded logic he might also argue we should destroy our canine best friends when they reach age 10 ½, which is 75 in dog years. People over age 75 make treasured contributions to the world, even if their vigor and strength may not be as robust as they once were. My father, Judge James O'Keefe, was the beloved patriarch of our family. When my parents arrived for a visit, he would come bursting through the front doors bellowing, "We're here!" My children would run giggling to their "Grandpa Judge" and there were and hugs and kisses all around. After being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, my dad lived for only 11 weeks of pain-racked misery.

Mr. Emanuel, don't try to tell me the world is better off because my father departed this realm quickly about age 75. He was an unwavering source of wisdom and humor, loyalty and love. His passing at age 73 left a gaping hole at the center of our family. The intense, unconditional love parents feel for their children is unique. And no matter how old you are, losing your mother or father is emotionally devastating. Like being orphaned, it makes you feel more vulnerable and exposed to life's dangers and uncertainties.

Every day I'm surrounded by remarkable people over age 75 who inspire and teach me. My mother, Leatrice, who just celebrated her 85th birthday will be the first to



Dr. O'Keefe in front of his grandmother's home where he stayed in college.

admit, "getting older is not for sissies." Even so, she remains bright and full of vitality and is a wellspring of kindness and affection for her six children and 14 grandchildren, and her many friends and neighbors. She spends her time on countless small deeds, done with great love. Leatrice is practical, frugal, and resilient; the hallmark traits of her generation, who survived the Great Depression and WW II. Those are qualities we need more of, not less of in the 21st century.

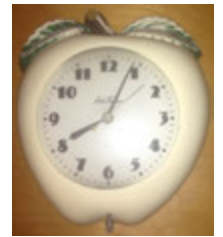
My grandmother Dorothy became a widow at age 73. A year later when I started college at the University of North Dakota (UND), she offered me free room and board at her home in Grand Forks. For about four years, two as an undergrad and two more as a medical student, I lived with her in her house on Lewis Boulevard about a mile from the college. Dorothy's spunky, cheerful attitude and her forward-looking optimism shaped my life profoundly. Following my time with her, another nine of her grandchildren took turns living with her and benefitting from her insight and love as they attended UND—all while she was between ages 75 and 90.

Life's Curves

The second half of your life doesn't have to be a long slide into disability and despair. In the 21st century, age 50 can be a fresh awakening to the beauty, opportunity and enjoyment in life. Fifty-somethings today are much more active and vital than people 50 and older were even a decade ago.

Although our parents and grandparents viewed age 50 as a time to start winding things down, today age 50 is about the time you should feel your second wind kicking in. Now, individuals over age 55 launch more new startup companies than any other age group.

Baby boomers are a huge demographic bulge headed toward retirement age. Still, I think my generation should get out of the mindset of retiring and instead plan on transitioning to another active pursuit. If you are going to be living into your 80s or 90s, you should be working at least into your 70s. My plan is to retire. . .never.



Graduating from the School of Hard Knocks

Sometimes life is kinda like a good movie—at first you don't really know what's going on, then after awhile you start to see the big picture and things begin to make sense.

Our youngest child, Caroline, just turned 15, and her 19-year-old sister, Kathleen, just left for college. They are blossoming into bright

Having the Time of Your Life

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and beautiful young women. Still, Joan says she wouldn't trade places with them for anything. I am often amused (or sometimes irritated) about how teenagers are so sure they already know everything. But you can't teach wisdom, and sometimes we all have to learn the hard way.

Good judgment comes from experience. And experience, well that comes from bad judgment. Life is for learning, and we all make mistakes along our journey. We only truly fail when we don't learn the lessons from our mistakes. It's taken me 58 years to understand the world and my role in it. Finally, I am at a point where I feel really grateful just to be alive, and I don't plan to ride off into

the sunset for quite a while yet.

Studies show that stress and anger peak in the early to mid-20s, and tend to decline steeply thereafter. Worry rises till our mid-40s and then begins to ease off. By about age 35 our sense of joie de vivre (joy for life) starts to wane, hitting rock bottom usually by about age 50.

But then miraculously, things start to look up, with our self-reported sense of well-being rising steadily through middle age. In fact, this mid-life enhancement in psychological well-being continues for the next few decades, typically sailing right on past Zeke Emanuel's drop-dead age of 75, and often even beyond 85, until our health fails. Which brings us full circle back to my life's passion—



Caroline and Kathleen are just beginning their journeys of a lifetime.

keeping you folks healthy and happy regardless of when you were born!

"Health is the greatest possession." ~ Lao Tzu

Youth

Youth is not a time of life—it is a state of mind, it is a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotions, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over love of ease.

Nobody grows old by merely living a number of years. People grow old only by deserting their ideals. Years wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul. Worry, doubt, self-distrust, fear and despair—these are the long, long years that bow the head and turn the growing spirit back to dust.



Whether age 19 or 98, there is in every being's heart the love of wonder, the sweet amazement at the stars and star-like things and thoughts, the undaunted challenge of events, the unfailing childlike appetite for what is to come next, and joy for the game of life.

You are as young as your faith,
as old as your doubt;

as young as your self-confidence,
as old as your fear,
as young as your hope,
as old as your despair.
When the wires are all down
and all the innermost core of your heart is covered with the snows of pessimism and the ice of cynicism,
then you are grown old indeed.

But so long as your heart receives messages of beauty, cheer, courage, grandeur and power from the earth, from man and from the Infinite, so long you are young.

Adapted from Youth a poem by: Samuel Ullman (1840-1924). Special thanks to our friend Stanley Bushman for sending it to us.

Lifestyle Habits to Help You Grow Younger

Aging isn't avoidable, but you can optimize the journey. Lifestyle choices that are under your own control can bestow longevity with graceful aging. Gratitude and a sense of humor, a healthy diet and a regimen of moderate exercise, restorative sleep each night and investing time and energy into your relationships will all help to stave off the ravages of old age.

You will most certainly grow healthier in even a few weeks if you learn to develop the right habits. Pick just one of lifestyle strategies below to start on; then after you've mastered it, work your way through the list one step at a time.

- 1** Get out for a walk or a jog regularly, ideally with a friend or a dog.
- 2** Make it a top priority to sleep 7 to 8.5 hours each night.
- 3** Fast for 12 hours each night. No calories after dinner until breakfast the next morning. Freed from the burdens of digesting and metabolizing calories, your system will purify and detoxify itself as you sleep, helping you to awaken rejuvenated.
- 4** Floss once a day and brush with a modern ultra-sonic toothbrush such as Sonicare twice a day.
- 5** Drink at least 8 eight-ounce glasses of water daily.
- 6** Each day, consume four cups of vegetables and one cup of fruit.



7 Eat a modest serving size (about the size of your palm) of lean protein three times a day. Try to consume vegetable protein such as nuts (only one handful), or legumes such as beans or lentils for one of the protein servings each day. For animal protein, choose fresh or frozen fish, skinless poultry and lean game or grass-fed beef. Avoid fatty, processed meats such as bacon, hot dogs, sausage and fried meats or fried fish.

8 Lift weights or do other strength training at least 20 minutes twice per week.

9 Have a regular checkup, get your recommended vaccines, and make sure you know your important numbers (blood pressure, waist circumference, glucose, cholesterol, vitamin D, etc.).

10 Eat more slowly, and stop when you are about 80 percent full.

11 Supplement only those nutrients that you are deficient in, which for many Americans include vitamin D and omega 3. Addition-

ally, many people benefit from an organic bone meal supplement if they have osteopenia or osteoporosis, and CoQ10 if they are on a statin for cholesterol lowering.

12 Nurture romance in your life. Make it a priority to be physically intimate with the love of your life a minimum of two or three times per week—doctor's orders. There's a prescription that is safe, fun, free and the closest thing you will find to the Fountain of Youth.

13 Grow healthy gut bacteria to bolster your immunity and enhance vitality. Each day consume at least a few bites or gulps of probiotic foods like kimchi, Greek yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut or kombucha. Also, every day drink a large glass of water with a heaping tablespoon of no-sugar Metamucil.

14 Each day, either just before you fall asleep at night or before you get out of bed in the morning, recall just one thing someone did for you for which you are grateful.

Listen to Your Gut, Follow Your Heart

Tapping into Your Body's Wisdom

"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift."

~ Albert Einstein

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

The first time I traveled to Ireland, I had an intense and unmistakable feeling of déjà vu. Even though I had never been to the Emerald Isle before, it seemed like home. The climate, the landscapes, the Irish Sea, and even the people...all seemed familiar and comfortable to me. It's a sensation I've never experienced during my travels to other countries around the globe.

Since then I have had a comprehensive DNA analysis, which documented that about 70 percent of my ancestors were Celts. So, perhaps it's no coincidence that every time I go to Ireland, it feels hauntingly like home. Ireland is the environment for which my ancient forebears, and I, are genetically adapted, which is probably why it resonates with a very deep and instinctual part of me.

A soft small voice from deep inside of you, or a subtle urge. That warm feeling in your heart, butterflies in your stomach, a chill down your spine, or cold clammy hands. Your innate wisdom, often called gut instinct, is always talking to you. But what is your subconscious mind trying to tell you, and why should you even care? Well, for starters, it's how



true wisdom manifests itself. What's more, you can trust your intuition. Gut instincts won't lie like people sometimes do. Gut feelings come from an unconscious voice guiding you to do the right thing. If you learn to listen to this silent wisdom, it will lead you safely to success, happiness and love.

You have likely had the experience of knowing something instinctively, without any explanation of why or how you know it. You decide on a whim to take the elevator from the third floor to the fourth instead of climbing the stairs, and wind up meeting your soul mate for life on that brief ride. You pause inexplicably a few seconds as the stoplight turns green, and narrowly avoid being T-boned by a speeding car careening through the red light. You have a premonition telling you move your Jeep into the garage, but ignore it. Fifteen minutes later a thunderstorm blows down a large tree limb, shattering the windshield and crushing the hood and roof of your car.

Incidentally, all three of these examples have actually happened to me; the last two incidents occurred just this fall—yikes! The first one

happened decades ago when I met my wife, Joan, for the first time while we were both training at the Mayo Clinic.

Thinking Fast, Thinking Slow

Nobel Prize laureate Daniel Kahneman refers to the conscious mind as the "slow thinking" part of the brain, because it works at a relatively sluggish pace, can take in information from only a few inputs simultaneously and is miserably bad at multi-tasking. On the other hand, your subconscious mind is lightning-fast: capable of processing millions of bits of information concurrently and in many ways is smarter than the most powerful supercomputer in the world.

This unconscious or subconscious part of your brain is in charge of keeping you alive and safe as you make your way through your day-to-day activities. Below the surface of your consciousness, your subliminal mind does most of its work automatically, precisely and continuously controlling your heart, blood vessels,

digestion, temperature, metabolism and breathing among countless other functions.

The intuitive part of your mind resides predominantly in the right brain, which continually monitors the environment around you, even while your conscious left brain is otherwise preoccupied. Indeed, the body is always collecting massive quantities of data, and continually streams it to the subconscious brain, which analyzes it and responds. All the while your conscious mind is blissfully oblivious to what might be going on.

Although your subconscious mind may seem inaccessible, you can learn to tap into its wisdom. When you have a “gut feeling,” that’s your subconscious mind talking to you. This phenomenon is also referred to as intuition, instinct, premonition, or feeling from the heart. If only we could tap into those insights more reliably. Well, it turns out that we can, particularly if you keep your antennae up and actively scanning for specific signals—like sweaty palms, a flushed face, a strange feeling in your stomach, an ache in your heart, or an inexplicable hunch that something might be up.

Some intuition is learned, which is why wisdom usually comes with age. We each get only so many trips around the sun, so it’s important to learn these lessons sooner rather than later. Other aspects of our intuition are passed down to us genetically from ancient predecessors who sometimes had to rely upon their instincts for survival.

Harnessing Your Gut Feelings

Once you learn to perceive your gut feelings, the next step is to focus on them with your conscious mind.

After an instinctive “hit,” you can employ your rational mind to assess the situation and decide what, if anything, needs to be done. Because gut feelings are often hard to interpret, I have learned to try to simplify the information by giving myself two choices. By way of example, say a new medication is released and hailed as a “miracle cure.” Yet something about it raises a red flag with my medical instincts, so I ask myself: “Do my gut feelings tell me that I am better off a) prescribing this drug now, or b) waiting to get more information and seeing how it performs in the real world?” For me, this little exercise nearly always allows me to harness the power of my intuition, which usually helps me to make the right decision.

Here are a few specific examples of gut instincts that would be advantageous for you to recognize.

Something Seems Wrong



Your heart, brain and body are powerful intuitive communicators, and tuning into their subtle cues is crucial for maintaining ideal health and well-being. Intuition will typically alert you to the first warning signs if and when problems are developing somewhere in your system.

If you sense a gut feeling about your health—such as something seems weak, or out of sync, or different in a bad way—listen to the message. Talk to your physician and get

it checked out. Oftentimes people ignore a vague but persistent sense that something isn’t right, and then eventually develop a serious health problem that could have been more easily treated had it been discovered sooner.

You’ll Know the Truth by the Way It Feels

Ancient biological wisdom has been hard-wired into humans. For instance, we can usually quickly detect whether a stranger is friendly or hostile. In the harsh natural world in which wild humans lived, this ability to read emotions and instantaneously distinguish friend from foe sometimes made the difference between life and death. If you have a feeling that someone is not trustworthy, you should probably pay attention to it. Or if you are in a situation where you sense danger, such as walking down a dark alley, don’t panic, but don’t dismiss the feeling—get to a safer spot promptly.

Many people typically feel intuitions in the chest or stomach regions, and in fact the nerves supplying the heart and gastrointestinal system are complex and extensively linked to the brain—sometimes this system is even referred to as the “second brain.”

Experts advise paying close attention to physical sensations you have when interacting with others. One researcher recounted an incident that occurred while traveling in India. He decided not to climb into a taxi because he noted a sudden “burning sensation” in his stomach. A short while later in the train station he witnessed the same cab driver being arrested for robbery.

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Listen to Your Gut, Follow Your Heart

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Listen to Your Body

When you are exhausted, your body and brain are pleading with you to go to bed. Pay attention to these signals. When you are sleep deprived and weary you need sleep much more than you need to watch a late night talk show or check your email.

When you have been sitting in front of a screen, your body and mind are yearning for physical movement and some fresh air—respond to these signals by taking even a short stroll outside for a few minutes. When you feel an infection or illness trying to get a foothold in your system, rest. It takes extra energy for your immune system to track down and kill off foreign viral and bacterial invaders.

This Just Feels Right

When your instinct tells you that something or someone is really right for you, the choice often becomes easier. When it feels healthy, wholesome and right, you should embrace it. On the other hand, when a situation seems forced or somehow not right, make a different choice, or at least defer the decision to a later date. When making truly important decisions, like choosing your career, your life partner, your home, undergoing an elective but serious medical procedure, it is especially important that you pay close attention to your intuition. Again, ask yourself, “What are my gut feelings telling me?”

Sometimes it’s best to not rely solely on your rational mind when making these momentous decisions. Rather than do a lot of anguished

over thinking, you are usually better off taking your time, sleeping on it, and letting your powerful subconscious mind churn through all the information. When you tune into your innate wisdom and wait for a clear gut instinct before you make up your mind, you will almost always makes the right decision.

Remember, your perceptive and intelligent subconscious alter-ego will be best able to speak to you in a loud-and-clear voice when you ask it a question that has only two options: Should I say yes or no? Do I feel better about moving to Seattle or staying in Kansas City? Am I better off going back to school

or sticking with my current job? You get the idea; imagine for an instant having made one of the two choices, and then the other. And see which one your intuitive Guardian Angel likes best. I find it’s often an easy call when framed in this manner.

Among the myriad reasons to listen to your gut feelings the most important may be this: you will be more likely to be satisfied with your decisions. Your gut feelings will tell you which people make you happy, and what choices will best improve the quality of your life. Your heart will lead you to relationships that fulfill your emotional needs, rather than something more superficial.



Elizabeth Gilbert’s Guardian Angel

In her powerful memoir, *Eat, Pray, Love*, Elizabeth Gilbert writes about how she tunes into a voice within herself when she is feeling especially distressed: “Even during the worst of suffering, that calm, compassionate, affectionate and infinitely wise voice is always available for a conversation on paper at any time of day or night. I’ve decided to let myself off the hook from worrying that conversing

with myself on paper means I’m a schizo. Maybe the voice I am reaching for is God, or maybe it’s my Guru speaking through me, or maybe it’s the angel who was assigned to my case, or maybe it’s my highest self.

What I write in my journal tonight is that I am weak and full of fear. I explain that depression and loneliness have shown up, and I’m scared they will never leave. In response, somewhere from within me, rises a now-familiar presence offering me all the certainties I have always wished another person would say to me when I was troubled. This is what I find myself writing to myself on the page: “I’m here. I love you. I don’t care if you need to stay up crying all night long. I will stay with you. If you need the medication again, go ahead and take it—I will love you through that, as well. There’s nothing you can ever do to lose my love. I will protect you until you die, and after your death I will still protect you. I am stronger than depression, and I am braver than loneliness and nothing will ever exhaust me.”

Quotes from the Heart

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



Bertha, explaining an unusual clause in her advance directive: "If I am ever on life support, unplug me—just for about 10 seconds and then plug me back in again—just to see if that might reboot me."

"My one regret in life is that I am not someone else."

~ Woody Allen

Dr. O'Keefe: "How often do you get up at night to use the bathroom?"
Tom: "So, I'm up twice a night, but I prefer to think of it as checking the perimeter. I'm retired military."

"You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments that stand out, the moments when you have really lived, are the moments when you have done things in the spirit of love."

~ Henry Drummond

"Your IQ test results came back. . . negative."

"Magic is everywhere. . .especially if you don't understand science."

"I swear, if my memory was any worse, I could plan my own surprise party."

"If you want to be happy for an hour, have a drink or two. If you want to be happy for three days, get married. If you want to be happy for a week, take a sunny vacation. But if you

want to be happy forever, become a gardener."

~ Chinese Proverb

"I didn't make it to the gym today. That makes five years in a row."

Dr. O'Keefe: "Harry, you look great for 88. What's your secret?"

Harry: "Hey, I'm not telling you. I'm gonna make a billion dollars selling my magic formula some day!"

"Don't worry about the world ending today. It's already tomorrow in Australia."

~ Charles Schultz

"When you are vulnerable, you inspire nurturing. With an open heart, you are embraced."

~ Lao Tzu

"Isn't it a bit unnerving that doctors call what they do 'practice'?"

~ George Carlin

"Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another heart whispers back."

~ Plato

"You can only be young once. But you can always be immature."

~ Dave Barry

"If you die in an elevator, be sure to push the up button."

~ Sam Levenson

Diet rule#1: If nobody sees you eating it, it doesn't contain any calories.

"I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night."

~ Sarah Williams

"My wife dresses to kill. She cooks the same way."

~ Henny Youngman

Amistad

John Adams: "The test ahead of us in court is an exceptionally difficult one."

Cinque: "We won't be going in there alone."

Adams: "Indeed not, we will have righteousness at our side."

Cinque: "No, I meant my ancestors. I will call into the past, far into the beginning of time, and beg them to help me at the trial. I will reach back and draw them into me. And they must come. . .for at this moment I am the whole reason they have existed at all."

"People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

~ F.L. Jordan, Ph.D.

"It's remarkable how much you can accomplish if you don't worry about who gets the credit."

"People say their weight is genetic. But it turns out that people who are overweight don't just have overweight kids, they have overweight pets. That's not genetic."

~ Mehmet Oz.

"Sometimes you can love too much."

Henry, after losing his wife, Marion, to whom he had been lovingly devoted for 62 years.



Numbers Can Deceive: It Matters How They Were Achieved

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D., with James J. DiNicolantonio, Pharm.D.

Sid is skeptical about taking any prescription medications, but he has high cholesterol so he had been taking over-the-counter niacin, which is a B vitamin. To be precise, he was on high-dose (3 grams daily) sustained-release niacin. He had heard about the dangers of statins, and told himself that niacin “is just a vitamin, so it has to be safe.”

I met him when he was recently admitted to the hospital with liver failure caused by the niacin. He survived and his liver partially recovered, but his was a rare, yet catastrophic example of why niacin has fallen from grace as a cholesterol treatment.

For over 50 years, niacin has been a mainstay of the cholesterol therapy options, though I have been wary of this agent. When I was a young cardiologist in my 30s, I personally took 3 grams daily of niacin for almost eight years, so I know how unpleasant it can be to take.

It often triggers flushing and itching of the skin, and also can cause serious stomach upset. One day, I unknowingly dropped one of the 500 mg white tablets on the floor of the kitchen, which our son Jimmy, a toddler at the time, discovered and swallowed later that day. He immediately turned beet-red, and was paralyzed with fright, prompting Joan to dial 911. When Joan figured out what happened, she was not pleased—I was in the “dog house” for a few days.



One of the negative side effects of niacin is flushing.

Niacin’s Flame Out

Recently, two giant trials, AIM-HIGH and HPS2-Thrive collectively randomized about 30,000 patients to niacin or placebo. These studies showed that niacin, despite improving the cholesterol profile numbers, did not enhance cardiovascular health.

Of concern, the niacin appeared to increase risk for infections, atrial fibrillation, diabetes, bleeding and gout. Thus, niacin’s role in current-day clinical practice is somewhat limited, especially considering that this agent can be difficult to take due to flushing and stomach upset. I tell my patients, niacin won’t make you live longer, but it might seem longer due to its nasty side effects.

If you are still taking niacin, talk to your doctor; you may be better off without it, even though your cholesterol profile may look worse.

In the history of medicine, statins are by far the most thoroughly investigated drug class ever. A large number of randomized placebo-controlled trials—our “Gold Standard” scientific method for discovering the truth—indicate that statins are safe and effective drugs.

We know without a doubt that if you have coronary disease or are at high risk for heart disease, a statin will not just improve your cholesterol numbers, but more importantly—it will help prevent heart attack, stroke and cardiovascular death.

IMPROVE IT is a very large trial that was just released, which proved that Zetia (ezetimibe) when added to a statin helps to lower risk

of heart attack, stroke and cardiac death. This combination of ezetimibe + statin therapy is very effective for both lowering bad LDL cholesterol, and improving long-term cardiovascular health.

Worshipping False Gods

In the United States, doctors and the general public often cling to the “idolatry of the surrogate,” which means they are usually satisfied when they have improved the levels of cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure. If you are on niacin, ask your doctor if Zetia might be a better option to combine with a statin.

In reality, these numbers are just surrogate markers—indicators of risk for future health trouble. Altering these numbers will not generally change the way you feel at all, and may not improve your long-term cardiovascular health.

You count on your health care provider to keep you alive, healthy, and capable of enjoying life for decades to come, not just to normalize your numbers. Because when it comes achieving meaningful enhancements to well-being and longevity, the numbers don't tell the whole story. In fact, sometimes they tell blatant lies. Still, it's not that the numbers don't matter at all—they can be helpful markers. Yet, equally important as the precise readings, is how these numbers were attained.

For example, let's say Jay is an obese 42-year-old who is discouraged about his inability to lose weight, so he takes up cigarette smoking and develops a methamphetamine addiction. Although, six weeks later the scale says Jay is 30 pounds lighter, his future prospects for health and well-being have in fact deteriorated dramatically. On the other hand, had Jay adopted Daisy the Golden Retriever, gotten in a routine of taking her

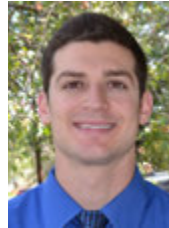
out for walks, and quit eating anything with added sugar, he would've shed those same 30 pounds and also markedly enhanced both the quality and quantity of his life.

How to Prevent a Million Heart Attacks and Strokes

James DiNicolantonio (a doctor of pharmacy and cardiovascular research scientist at Saint Luke's) and I wrote an article entitled: It Takes the Right Medications to Prevent a Million Heart Attacks and Strokes, published in the current issue of the journal *Postgraduate Medicine*.

Heart attacks and strokes are the first and third leading causes of death among Americans today. This disturbing fact has led President Obama to create “Million Hearts,” a nationwide initiative with ambitions to reduce heart attacks and strokes by 1 million over the next five years through widespread and appropriate use of aspirin, blood pressure control, cholesterol management, and smoking cessation (hence the acronym, ABCS).

Although this is a laudable goal, it will only be achieved by using lifestyle changes and medications that have been proven to reduce heart attacks and strokes. Unfortunately, many of the most commonly prescribed blood pressure medications have never been shown to reduce heart attacks, strokes, or deaths, and shockingly for some agents there is even evidence of harm. The most frequently prescribed thiazide diuretic for lowering blood pressure in the United States is hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ), with well over 1 million Americans receiving a prescription for this “fluid pill” each year.



James
DiNicolantonio,
Pharm.D.

However, HCTZ has never been shown to reduce risk for heart attacks and/or strokes compared to placebo. In contrast, only a fraction of that many people received chlorthalidone or indapamide, which are two diuretics similar to HCTZ, but more effective for lowering blood pressure.

These agents have been proven to lower the risk of heart attack and stroke. Similarly, atenolol, one of the most widely prescribed beta-blockers in the United States, lacks evidence for reducing heart attacks and strokes compared to placebo in patients with high blood pressure.

In contrast, carvedilol and metoprolol are two other drugs from the same beta-blocker class that are proven to reduce not just blood pressure and heart rate, but also lower risks for adverse cardiovascular events like heart attack and stroke. Some of the other drugs that have been proven to reduce risks for heart attack, stroke, and cardiovascular death are listed below. Talk to your health care provider if you have questions about whether one of these might be right for you.

Drugs Proven to Prevent Heart Attacks and Strokes... Not Just Improve the Numbers

Cholesterol Medicines

- Atorvastatin (Lipitor), rosuvastatin (Crestor), simvastatin, pravastatin and other statins
- Ezetimibe (Zetia)

Blood Pressure Medicines

- Carvedilol, metoprolol
- Amlodipine
- Perindopril, ramipril, lisinopril, and other ACE inhibitors
- Chlorthalidone, indapamide

Diabetes Medicines

- Metformin, pioglitazone

How Sweet It Isn't

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D., James J. DiNicolantonio, Pharm.D., and Joan O'Keefe, R.D.

My wife Joan is not sweet—well not her diet anyway. Joan has the best practical understanding of nutrition of anyone I have ever met; and she practices what she preaches. Her #1 cardinal rule for her own diet: avoid consuming ANYTHING with added sugar (table sugar or high-fructose corn syrup) or anything considered “free sugars” (e.g. honey, fruit juice, agave syrup, other syrups).

In fact, she doesn't even eat much fruit—and instead makes it a point to consume at least eight servings of fresh vegetables such as leafy greens, cabbage, broccoli, kale, arugula, avocado, and tomatoes every day.

Joan says avoiding sugar, and eating lots of non-fattening vegetables, are the two most important dietary steps for staying youthful and beautiful, not to mention healthy and happy. This doesn't have to be complicated—eat or drink NOTHING with added sugar and do not consume “free sugars” (see above for examples).

Eliminating all rapidly absorbable carbohydrates (e.g. flour, pasta, beer, cereal, etc.) is another great way to improve your health and appearance. For decades public health officials have urged us to slash our salt intake to a max of one teaspoon a day (and even less for certain populations). While these “enlightened experts” essentially ignored the fact that the average American adult consumes about 140 pounds of sugar each year, and another 150 pounds of wheat. Let's be clear, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a healthy waistline and vigorous health with a sharp mind while eating these massive quantities of added caloric sweeteners, free sugars and rapidly absorbable carbohydrates.

Joan hates the old adage: “Everything in moderation.” A person living by this motto, for example, might eat just one bowl of Fruit Loops for breakfast, and a small muffin from Starbucks mid-morning; for lunch a medium-sized croissant sandwich and only one cookie; for a mid-afternoon snack, just one soft drink and small doughnut; and for dinner just a modest amount of mashed potatoes, only one roll, and merely a single scoop of ice cream for dessert. This “moderate” diet

is a nutritional DISASTER—loaded with sugar and processed carbs that trigger blood glucose spikes of at least 130 to 200 mg/dL five times during this typical American's day.

Each time your glucose levels skyrocket, the blood levels of free radicals and inflammation spike as well—eventually cooking your brain, rusting your joints, wrinkling your skin, clouding your vision, and clogging your arteries. Additionally, these sugar “spikes” are followed by “crashes,” leading to subsequent hunger and continued craving of these rapidly absorbable carbohydrates.

Moderation is not good enough when it comes to sugar and white flour—if your goal is to thrive you should shun these foods. The less you consume of these foods and drinks, the better you look and feel. Joan isn't even tempted anymore by desserts she used to enjoy—she has lost her taste for sweets entirely. Sugar and wheat are addictive: the more you consume of them, the more you crave them. However, if you stop consuming sweets and wheat, in just a few weeks you will find that you don't miss them anymore. In fact, because Joan no longer eats or drinks or serves me anything with sugar in it, I too have lost my taste for sweets.

When I am offered candy, or a doughnut or a cookie, rather than thinking, “That would taste great,” I instinctively know, “I would feel miserable about 30 to 60 minutes later.” Honestly, it's easy to avoid junk food once you have gotten over the addiction, and are able to feel the inflammation coursing through your system immediately after eating or drinking these delicious but toxic treats.



Sugar, Not Salt, is the Worst Dietary Evil

Excess sugar in your diet will increase your chances of dying from cardiovascular disease. A JAMA: Internal Medicine study in 2014 found that people who got 25 percent or more of their calories from added sugar almost tripled their risk of cardiovascular death, compared to people who consumed less than 10 percent of their calories in the form of added sugar.

In a recent article in the *American Journal of Cardiology*, my colleague, James DiNicolantonio (doctor of pharmacy and cardiovascular research scientist at Saint Luke's), and I proposed that the chief villain behind this epidemic of high blood pressure and cardiometabolic disease is added sugars, not salt (sodium). This notion is supported by meta-analyses of large-scale randomized trials indicating that sugar is more strongly related to blood pressure in humans than is sodium. Thus, encouraging Americans to hold the sugar, not the salt, may be the better nutritional strategy for achieving and maintaining healthy blood pressure.

High blood pressure is a lethal, but highly preventable/treatable cause of stroke, heart failure and heart disease. Studies show that nine out of 10 Americans either already have high blood pressure, or will develop it in the future.

Consuming large amounts of added sugars stimulates a key area of the brain called the ventromedial hypothalamus, which raises heart rate and blood pressure. A sugary treat also spikes the blood levels of the hormone insulin, which can speed up the heart rate and predis-

pose to high blood pressure (especially when insulin levels are chronically elevated).

On the other hand, the claims that reducing salt intake will lower levels of obesity, heart disease, cardiac deaths, or even high blood pressure are surprisingly weak, despite many large trials designed to prove sodium is bad. In fact, we argue the opposite may be true: a marked reduction in salt intake may lead to an increased intake in processed foods (and added sugars) and, thus, increase the risk of diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease.

Breaking the Sugar Addiction

Most adults consume about 400 to 600 calories daily from added sugar. In an effort to fight back against the rising tide of obesity and diabetes, the American Heart Association recently recommended we cut our daily intake of sugar to about 100 calories for women (six teaspoonfuls of sugar) and 150 calories for men (nine teaspoonfuls).

Naturally occurring sugars are found in whole foods such as fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose). Mother Nature always puts fiber (fruit) or protein (milk) with the sugar that is present in these whole, natural foods, which helps to slow the absorption and prevent spikes in blood glucose. Nature NEVER combines high sugar with high fat in a single food. There was no such thing as ice cream for ancient humans living in the wild. Sure, honey was an almost pure-sugar sweet treat hunter-gatherers enjoyed on rare occasions, but they would have burned off the glucose load as they dashed away from the swarm of angry bees.

Foods and Beverages to Avoid:

Added sugars include any sugars or caloric sweeteners that are added to foods or beverages during processing or preparation (such as putting sugar in your coffee or adding sugar to your cereal). These are all bad: it doesn't matter if the added sugars are natural such as maple syrup, honey, agave nectar, or cane sugar, or are chemically manufactured sweeteners such as white sugar and high-fructose corn syrup.

These types of foods cause premature aging of the skin, brain, and cardiovascular system. Avoid:

- Sugar-sweetened beverages like sodas and sports drinks
- Desserts like pies, cakes, doughnuts and cookies
- Fruit drinks
- Ice cream
- Candy
- Ready-to-eat cereals
- Breads

Sugar by Any Other Name...

Code names for added sugar as disguised on labels:

- Brown sugar
- Corn sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Fruit juice concentrates
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Honey
- Invert sugar
- Malt sugar
- Molasses
- Raw sugar
- Syrup
- Organic cane sugar
- Sugar molecules ending in "ose" (such as dextrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, maltose, sucrose)



Wholehearted Yoga: The Zen Approach to Heart Health

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

I love yoga, and it's a regular part of my evening or morning routine. My favorite spot to do yoga is in front of our gas log fireplace. I roll out my yoga mat, and in the quiet darkness I stare into the flickering flames and breathe deeply through my nose with my mouth closed. As I go through a series of stretches that I know by heart, I can feel yoga's calming effects flowing through my body and brain. For me, yoga improves my posture, helps me sleep more soundly, and dissolves stress.

The origin of yoga stretches back 5,000 years ago to ancient India, where it was developed to bring tranquility and spiritual awareness. Today, yoga is hugely popular with Americans, perhaps in response to our increasingly rushed and frenzied lifestyles. Clearly, yoga is great for helping to reduce stress and improve flexibility, but the latest studies show that it may also lower blood pressure and improve heart health.

"You're only as young as your spine is flexible." ~ Bob Harper

Yoga is an ideal exercise for conferring suppleness and balance. Traditional yoga involves slowly stretching the body into a variety of poses while at the same time focusing on slow, deep breathing—to help you stay in the moment and clear your mind of worries. In this way, yoga is useful for promoting physical, mental and emotional well-being. However, yoga doesn't count toward the recommended 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity per week. So don't

think of yoga as a substitute for your aerobic exercise (cardio) or strength training (weightlifting), but rather as a third facet to complement these other two key aspects of fitness.

Yoga for Life

Yoga appears to be helpful for preventing recurrences of atrial fibrillation (Afib), and also lowers heart rate and blood pressure, improves lung function and breathing capacity, and relaxes blood vessels, while at the same time reducing anxiety, improving sleep quality, building muscle, and improving both balance and stability.

"Mindfulness helps you go home to the present. And every time you go there, you find happiness."

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

Yoga also has proven beneficial for people after heart attack, cardiac arrest, bypass surgery, or coronary stenting. After a serious cardiac event, many people feel significant emotional distress and depression. Yoga can be a very effective strategy to help manage these stresses. For example, worry and anguish are common reactions to the sudden realization that you have a serious heart condition that you may have to deal with for the rest of your life.

The calming and centering effects of yoga can help to stay in the moment and thus ease worries and improve mood. Many people begin to see and feel these benefits almost immediately after starting a yoga practice. Additionally, after 12 weeks many heart disease patients see



significant improvements in levels of cholesterol and blood pressure, and also have fewer palpitations or irregularities of their heart beat.

Yoga Rebalances Your System

Breathing techniques of yoga help to rebalance the autonomic nervous system—the network of brain and nerve connections that automatically prepare you to either a) fight and/or flee (via adrenalin discharge), or b) relax, digest your food, and bond emotionally with others (vagal tone). This fits nicely into the ancient Chinese philosophy of yin and yang—complementary forces of opposites in a dynamic interaction. Yin and yang duality is everywhere in nature (for instance a shadow cannot exist without light).

Doing yoga poses while breathing deeply gently rebalances the autonomic nervous system and nudges it away from a multi-tasking high-pressure outlook and back toward a calm and mindful state. Yoga can help to integrate the body, mind and spirit, which will confer healing and relaxation. A regular practice of yoga works well in synergy with modern high-tech drugs and procedures. This holistic approach can help improve the well-being of both brain and body.

Take-Home Messages about Yoga:

This unique form of exercise incorporates stretching, breathing and meditation, and tends to calm and quiet the mind and relieve emotional stress. A regular yoga practice cultivates a focused and relaxed mind, with a strong and supple body and a resilient heart. Try to do even 15 minutes of yoga a few times a week. Best results are seen with 30- to 90-minute sessions at least twice a week. It's often helpful to go to a yoga class to begin a practice. Look for an instructor who has experience with people with medical issues such as heart disease or Afib.

AHA Recommendation for Overall Cardiovascular Health:

- At least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity at least five days per week for a total of 150 minutes.

OR

- At least 25 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity at least three days per week for a total of 75 minutes; or a combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.

AND

- Moderate- to high-intensity muscle-strengthening activity at least two days per week for additional health benefits.

For Lowering Blood Pressure and Cholesterol:

- An average of 40 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity three or four times per week.

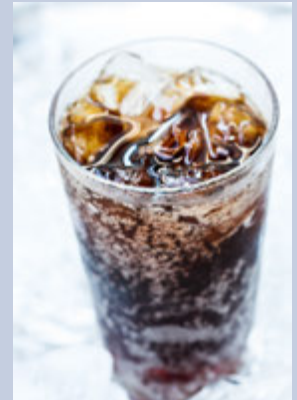
Soft Drinks Accelerate Aging

It has become increasingly clear that a habit of consuming soft drinks (also called pop or sodas) leads to obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Brand new research shows that drinking sugar-sweetened beverages on a daily basis also may speed up aging at the genetic level. Telomeres are the repeating DNA sequences at the ends of chromosomes that tend to shorten as we age. Like the plastic tips at the ends of shoelaces, the telomeres prevent the DNA from unraveling. Once the telomeres are burned away, the person can't make new copies of cells, and he or she will die within in a few months.

This new study from the University of California, San Francisco evaluated the telomeres of white blood cells from 5,309 individuals who participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) from 1999 through 2002. The researchers calculated that the telomere shortening noted among people who drank one 20-ounce soft drink per day was equal to the age-accelerating effects of cigarette smoking. Looked at another way, drinking pop on a daily basis prematurely aged a person by approximately five years. By shortening telomeres, soft drinks not only reduce one's longevity, but also increase risks for heart disease, diabetes and some forms of cancer.

This is not entirely surprising; previous research has suggested that consuming even one sugar-containing soft drink on a daily basis can lead to weight gain—especially around the waist. A different study showed that a woman who develops a habit of consuming even one soft drink per day increases her risk of developing diabetes by over 80 percent.

Take Home Message: Shun all sweetened soft drinks, pop, sports drinks (e.g. Gatorade), energy drinks, fruit drinks, etc. Choose instead water (purified or filtered is ideal), tea (especially green tea) or sparkling water/mineral water (fruit flavored is okay; just no sweeteners).



So What's the Downside to Sugar?

Bad things that can happen to people who indulge their "sweet tooth:"

- Obesity
- Alzheimer's Disease
- Diabetes (and the related complications, nephropathy, neuropathy, retinopathy)
- Osteoporosis
- Premature skin aging and wrinkles
- High blood pressure
- Coronary disease
- Cerebrovascular disease
- Gum disease and tooth decay
- Fatty liver
- Kidney disease
- Cataracts

Build Muscles. . . They Might Just Save Your Life

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

Marie is 59 and generally healthy, but when she was lifting groceries last month she felt a sudden pain in her upper back. An X-ray showed a compression fracture in the mid-chest segment of her spine, and a DEXA scan showed that she has osteopenia/osteoporosis. Marie's mother died last year of a heart attack. Her mom also had osteoporosis and a dowager's hump on her back, which took several inches off her height and left her looking like an old woman by the time she was middle-aged.

When we checked a Cardioscan on Marie, we found that although her spine doesn't have enough calcium in it, her coronary arteries are heavily calcified. When we are young and vigorous, our bones are rock hard and our arteries are soft and supple. As the years go by, many people develop soft bones and hard arteries, which is a very bad combination that will age you before your time. It can even ruin your quality of life and reduce your longevity.

I suggested that Marie improve her nutrition, take a vitamin D capsule as well as an organic bone meal supplement, and also begin a weightlifting program. Strength training may be the most important exercise of all, especially for people over age 65. Resistance training helps to build muscle mass, strengthen bones, improve balance, prevent falls and fractures, and enhance quality of life. Loss of muscle mass leads to frailty and loss of independence, and recent studies show this can even shorten life expectancy.



New research shows that the more muscle mass seniors have, the less likely they are to die early. Body composition (proportions of weight comprised of muscle, bone and fat) is a powerful predictor of your future risk of death from any cause over the next decade. Researchers from UCLA closely followed 3,659

people, including men who were age 55 or older and women who were at least age 65. Muscle mass as a function of height was measured precisely for all participants at time of enrollment in the study.

They found the greater one's muscle mass was, the lower the risk of death during the 10-year follow-up period. Arun Karlamangla, M.D., coauthor of the study said, "Thus, rather than worrying about weight or BMI, we should be trying to maintain muscle mass." Think of building muscles today to keep you safe and strong for the decades to come; the way you save money to keep you financially secure as you get older.

How to Build and Maintain Strong and Healthy Muscles

- **Strength training.** Weightlifting is ideal; it's best to get a consult from a trainer when you start your muscle-building program to avoid injury. Body weight exercises like push-ups, chair squats, lunges, and bridges are also effective for increasing or maintaining muscle mass and are easy to do anywhere. Try to do strength training two or three times per week.

- **Protein consumption.** Dietary intake of protein will provide the amino acid developing blocks that are necessary for building new muscle. Best foods for improving and maintaining your muscle are: skinless poultry, lean red meat, dairy foods including whey protein, along with some plant protein such as lentils, nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans, etc.), beans and peas.

- **Vitamin D.** Keeping your vitamin D levels in the normal range is fundamental for building and preserving muscle and bone. Sunshine and supplements are both useful for maintaining healthy vitamin D levels.

- **Diet composition.** Eat lots of fresh produce, at least five servings daily to keep your system alkaline, rather than acidic. This is great for many reasons, including promoting ideal body composition.

- **Vitamin B12 and folate.** Rich sources of vitamin B12 include: clams, trout, tuna, beef, salmon, egg yolks, cheese and yogurt. Folate is found in abundance in spinach, asparagus, Brussels sprouts, avocado, broccoli, kale and legumes.

A supplement of organic bone meal with added magnesium and vitamin K2 will provide virtually all of the essential nutrients to build strong and sturdy bones. This is safer and more effective than a standard calcium supplement, which may harden arteries rather than bones.

My Heartfelt Shamrock Plant

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

A long time ago, a special lady named Mary Lou gave me a potted plant. She told me, “Dr. O’Keefe, you will love this shamrock plant. It has heart-shaped leaves and pretty pink blossoms; and it’s so hardy you can’t kill it.”

Mary Lou was a lovable and energetic soul who traveled around the country and spoke at seminars inspiring women with messages of hope and resilience. She developed coronary disease, that’s how I came to know her; but really had no symptoms or limitations from the blockages in her heart arteries. During a routine annual check-up, her stress test showed a new, albeit mild, abnormality, so I ordered a coronary angiogram.

This revealed a 70 percent blockage in the important left anterior descending (LAD) coronary artery, so the cardiologist doing the procedure opened the blockage with balloon angioplasty, which was the standard treatment in that era before coronary stents. A few hours later, with no warning, the artery suddenly clotted off. Mary Lou’s heart stopped, and the team was unable to resuscitate her. She passed away at age 74—too soon.

Twenty years later I’m still nurturing my Shamrock plant. I move it outside in the spring and bring it back indoors in the fall; often while I am watering or feeding it, I think of Mary Lou. The treatment for coronary disease has advanced dramatically over the past two decades. Now we understand this to be a more complex process than a simple plumbing problem. Just because a heart artery is partially



blocked doesn’t necessarily mean that a procedure like bypass surgery or angioplasty/coronary stenting is always the best course of action.

Effective and proven non-invasive regimens such as medications, nutrition, exercise and lifestyle changes can often partly melt plaques away and markedly reduce angina (chest discomfort), as well as lower the risk of heart attack and/or cardiovascular death. Additionally, we have new stents and novel drugs that help to prevent re-narrowing and/or clotting in the coronary arteries after the stents have been placed.

We know for sure that angioplasty with stenting prevents heart damage and saves lives when one of the arteries supplying the heart suddenly closes. We call this acute coronary syndrome, which includes heart attack and unstable angina (sudden worsening of chest discomfort). This is a life-threatening crisis that requires urgent angioplasty/

stenting as soon as possible. Yet, many individuals with stable coronary disease can be treated without immediately resorting to stenting or bypass surgery.

Our team of cardiologists at Saint Luke’s Mid America Heart Institute is participating in the ISCHEMIA Trial. This is a pivotal nationwide randomized study to help us understand when we need to send people with stable coronary disease for procedures to stent or bypass their blocked coronary arteries.

The trial results will not be available for a few years. In the meanwhile, you can be assured that your physicians at Saint Luke’s Cardiovascular Consultants heed the advice of Hippocrates—the father of medicine—who urged, “First do no harm,” when we are taking care of our patients.



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The Goldilocks Principle for Blood Pressure: Mid-range is Just Right!

Increasingly it is becoming clear that blood pressure, like most things in life, is best when it's not too high, but not too low either; the safe mid-range is just right—think of it as the "Goldilocks" principle.

The national blood pressure guidelines (called JNC 8) came out earlier this year. There are a few important changes:

- For people age 60 or older, the goal blood pressure is less than 150/90, with the emphasis on the top number as the most important goal. So if the top blood pressure runs above 150 on a regular basis, an antihypertensive (blood pressure-lowering) drug should be prescribed.
- For those individuals under age 60, the blood pressure goal remains 140/90, but for these younger individuals, the more important of the two numbers is the bottom one. Recent studies suggest that a J-shaped curve may exist for blood pressure: just like it does for many risk factors including alcohol intake, blood sugar, exercise and weight.

This means, that while it's clearly bad to have untreated high blood pressure, it's also not a good idea to lower blood pressure excessively (less than 110 on the top number), as this might increase risk for other problems like falls, weakness and even heart attack, especially for people over age 70. So when we treat hypertension, we aim for ideal blood pressures in the safe moderate range, say 110/60 to 139/90, or even 149/90 for individuals over age 60.

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