

# Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing

MARCH 2009

Creating Optimum Health for Your Body and Soul

## Tips for Better Health

New research shows that **working overtime may impair cognitive function.** Middle-aged adults scored much higher on vocabulary and reasoning tests if they limited their work-week to 40 hours or less.

**Take heed if your spouse is at risk for cardiovascular disease.** Researchers recently found that if one spouse has risk factors, the other—even if presumably healthy—is more likely to have similar risks.

Check food labels carefully, as a new report shows that **high levels of sodium can hide in "heart-healthy" foods.** Tomato sauces, soups, and even cereals were among the culprits.

**Meditation may offer hope for attention-deficit hyperactivity sufferers:** Children who practiced transcendental meditation for 10 minutes twice a day reported lower stress and anxiety levels, and lessened ADHD symptoms.

## The Buzz about Honey

Research finds new uses for this ancient remedy

**D**escribed in the Koran as “a drink of many colors wherein there is healing for all people,” honey has been valued as a medicinal agent for thousands of years. The use of this golden liquid to heal wounds was even reported over 3,500 years ago in an Egyptian medical text. Despite its rich history, western researchers are only now beginning to understand the healing potential of this ancient remedy.

**Germ-Fighting** Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is now of great concern in both hospital and community-settings, and honey shows great promise in combating this superbug. New research suggests that honey from pollen of the *Leptospermum*, or manuka, shrub in New Zealand is effective in fighting MRSA, in addition to other harmful bacteria such as *Escherichia coli* (E. Coli), *Helicobacter pylori* (a common cause of peptic ulcers), and the bacteria responsible for chronic sinusitis. Manuka honey's antibacterial activity is attributed to unique compounds from the plant's nectar that seem to work synergistically to kill bacteria, going beyond the antibacterial qualities of hydrogen peroxide found in all honey varieties.

**Healing** Jennifer Eddy, MD, a professor at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine, is currently conducting a trial for the use of honey-covered dressings to treat open wounds, specifically diabetic foot ulcers. Rather than using more-expensive manuka honey, however, Dr. Eddy conducts her research with standard supermarket honey. She notes that most case studies of treating wounds with honey are from developing countries where cost is a major factor in determining care. Diabetic foot ulcers are a major source of medical costs in the US as well—leading to long periods of recovery and, in some cases, amputation—and honey offers promising results as a low-cost remedy for preventing infection, speeding healing, and reducing the need for repeated courses of strong antibiotics.

**Soothing** Another recent study found that buckwheat honey performed better than dextromethorphan (a common over-the-counter cough suppressant) to calm nighttime cough and improve sleep. To treat a sore throat, I recommend drinking a beverage of one-tablespoon honey combined with hot water and a twist of lemon. Buckwheat honey—dark in color and with a molasses-like flavor—can be found in natural health stores.

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# My Take on the News

- + The Latest Research
- + Notable Findings
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## Improving Memory is a Walk in the Park



Researchers in Michigan found that a brief walk in a natural environment can actually improve

memory performance and attention span. Participants in the study did 20 percent better on a memory test after spending an hour walking in a nature area versus walking through busy downtown streets. Weather had no effect on the outcome, according to researchers, as memory improved whether walking in 80-degree sunshine or 25-degree winter gloom. Even looking at pictures of nature seemed to benefit participants. (*Psychological Science*, December 2008)

**My take** I have long recommended spending time in nature—especially for city dwellers. We don't need to understand the mechanism to reap the benefits. I think it is also good to bring nature into your living space in the form of plants, rocks, and other things that remind you of the great outdoors.

## Drugs Raising Risks for Alzheimer's Patients

A new study found that long-term use of antipsychotic medications could result in early death for Alzheimer's patients. British researchers randomly assigned 128 Alzheimer's patients to either continue their antipsychotic treatment regimen or to receive a placebo. At the end of the 12-month study, the probability of survival was 70% in the treatment group versus 77% in the placebo group. But after three years, survival probability in the

treatment group dropped to 30%, while the placebo group's probability of survival was 59%. The antipsychotics used were chlorpromazine, haloperidol, risperidone, thioridazine, or trifluoperazine. (*The Lancet Neurology*, February 2009)

**My take** Antipsychotic medications are often used to treat Alzheimer's, though they have not been thoroughly evaluated for this use. These drugs are an important part of treatment for some patients—especially those so agitated or disturbed as to endanger themselves or others—but I feel that antipsychotics should be used only as a last resort. Non-drug approaches such as music therapy or high doses of fish oil may prove beneficial for some with advanced Alzheimer's.

## Coffee to Prevent Cancer of the Mouth and Throat?



Even in those at high risk of oral cancers, a daily cup of coffee may have a protective effect. A Japanese

study looked at the diet and lifestyle of 38,000 participants aged 40 to 64 years with no cancer history. During 13 years of study follow-up, researchers found that those who reported drinking one or more cups of coffee daily had half the risk of developing oral cancers compared to those who didn't drink it. (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, December 15, 2008)

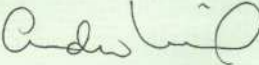
**My take** I find this interesting, but as with all retrospective research, we can't draw a cause-and-effect relationship. Proven strategies to reduce the risk of oral cancer are avoiding tobacco and limiting alcohol consumption.

## Dear Reader A Flexitarian Diet for Global Health

While I incorporate oily fish into my diet to get my beneficial omega-3s, I avoid meat and poultry. Mostly I eat vegetables, fruit, whole soy, and some whole grains. In addition to reaping the many health benefits of getting nutrients from primarily vegetarian sources, this way of eating offers an added benefit—it's much better for the environment. As food columnist Mark Bittman puts it in his new cookbook, *Food Matters: A Guide to Conscious Eating* (Simon & Schuster, 2009), "never before [have] issues of personal and global health intersected so exquisitely."

In 2005, researchers determined that the average annual meat consumption by a family of four is as bad for the environment as driving a sports utility vehicle for a year. Beef is one of the worst offenders: Feed must be grown to nourish cattle; cattle must be transported from farm to feed lot to slaughterhouse to processing plant; it's then shipped to the supermarket, and finally to your dinner table. Eating plants skips many of these steps, especially when you buy locally grown produce at farmers' markets.

If a strictly vegetarian diet is too extreme, consider becoming a "flexitarian." Derived from the words *flexible* and *vegetarian*, flexitarianism reaps most of the benefits of vegetarianism, but allows room for some meat. You can also mimic the many cultures that eat meat only on special occasions. Dawn Jackson Blatner, RN, nutritionist and author of *The Flexitarian Diet* (McGraw Hill, 2008), recommends starting with two meatless days per week and working up from there.

  
Andrew Weil, MD

**Andrew Weil, MD**, is the founder and director of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. The author of *Healthy Aging*, *8 Weeks to Optimum Health*, and *Spontaneous Healing*, Dr. Weil is a graduate of Harvard Medical School. He also established **The Weil Foundation**, a nonprofit organization that supports integrative medicine by funding training for practitioners, research, innovations in patient care, and policy reform.