

# Health/Education

## Heart disease, diabetes studied

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

People who have the type of diabetes that develops when they are young may keep their hearts healthy if they maintain normal blood pressure as well as an optimistic outlook, according to a new study. Trevor J. Orchard, a professor of

epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public Health who led the 10-year study, said the strongest indicator of heart disease in the 658 participants was high blood pressure, which has long been established as a significant risk factor. But depressive symptoms like feeling

down or disturbances in sleep or appetite were also more prevalent in study participants who developed heart disease.

"We're not at the point yet where we can say treating depressive symptoms early can prevent heart disease," Orchard said Dec. 7, "but we need to find out more about the mechanisms."

The study will be published in January's issue of the medical journal, *Atherosclerosis*.

Alan M. Jacobson, senior vice president of the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston and a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, said Orchard's findings contribute to a growing body of data linking depression to heart attacks and other outcomes of cardiovascular disease.

"The linkage raises interesting questions for future study and how we think about the nature of psychological problems and the outcomes of medical illnesses," Jacobson said.

"We tend to separate those two into distinct camps, but this study is one of a growing number of studies that show you can't just treat them as separate animals," he said.

Orchard said the participants in the Pitt study were not clinically diagnosed as depressed. Rather, they filled out questionnaires as doctors monitored their health over the span of a decade indicating whether they had depressive symptoms.

Moodiness or other symptoms may not have been severe enough to require psychiatric treatment, Orchard said.

"This opens up a nice new avenue for further exploration," he said.

The study examined risk factors for coronary heart disease and arterial disease in the lower leg, both of which are common complications of Type I diabetes.

That type of diabetes often develops in children or young teens whose pancreases fail to secrete enough insulin to help the body use sugar and other carbohydrates. It is treated with insulin injections.

A second type of diabetes, Type II, usually develops later in life when the body stops responding to normal levels of insulin.

## Clinton promotes food safety for holidays

ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Bill Clinton promoted two food safety measures on Saturday.

"With the actions we're taking today, our families can have the peace of mind they deserve every holiday season, and indeed, every day of the

year," Clinton said in his weekly radio address.

3.3 million eggs each year are infected with salmonella bacteria, causing 300,000 cases of illness. Egg producers and processors can choose between two "strategies of safety," Clinton said. "The first

happens at the farm, where extensive tests and rigorous practices will help prevent infected eggs from ever reaching your local grocery and the second happens at the packing plant, where new technologies like in-shell pasteurization will help keep eggs safe and free of bacteria."

## Y2K problems shrugged off by health officials

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

If you have a medical problem, or care for someone who does, all the talk about possible Year 2000 computer failures may sound a little scary.

Don't worry, say federal health officials and doctors responsible for safeguarding consumers.

Repeated checks of the nation's medical equipment have uncovered no serious problems since very few medical devices actually need to know what year it is to work. There are plenty of prescription drugs, so consumers should not hoard.

And don't forget, health workers handle emergencies every day. Doctors even operate right through hurricanes, using battery-operated lights if they have to. They know how to treat people without the help of computer-operated gadgets.

"We'll be prepared," says Dr. Donald Palmisano, a New Orleans surgeon and trustee of the American Medical Association. "The most important thing right now is for people not to panic."

Consumers can ask their doctors if they and local hospitals have prepared for Y2K, Palmisano advised, and take some prudent steps to ensure they're ready for any medical situation, like keeping records of insurance claims and lists of medications handy.

There could be annoying glitches if computers get confused when the calendar changes from 1999 to 2000. Medicare is ready to pay elderly Americans' health bills, but worries that some doctors or hospitals haven't fixed their computer billing programs so they accurately recognize the new year.

If your doctor 'messed up' and tries to stick you with the bill, remember "you won't have to pay for services Medicare normally covers," stressed Medicare administrator Nancy-Ann DeParle. Medicare patients should call 1-800-633-4227 if they get a bill they should not have received.

Here, in question and answer form, is a look at some common Y2K health questions:

Q. Will my pacemaker stop working on Jan. 1? What if I'm in the hospital under anesthesia?

A. Pacemakers and anesthesia machines "could care less about what day it is," said Dr. David Feigal of the Food and Drug Administration. They measure time second-to-second or hour-to-hour and will keep right on ticking as the century turns.

The FDA has found no device implanted into people that causes any Y2K concern.

Some other medical machines do have computer chips that use a date, but a recent FDA audit concluded those that pose risks to patients have been fixed. Some radiation equipment, for instance, calculates patient's radiation dose based on their age, something easy to fix with a software change. Patients can ask their radiation technician if that was done. "The answer should be either, 'No, our system doesn't use that kind of calculation,' or 'Yes... we've double-checked and it calculated your age right,'" Feigal said.

The nation's hospitals have spent \$8 billion preparing for Y2K. Aside from FDA-monitored medical machines, remember hospitals are prepared for the unexpected every day, says Rick

Wade of the American Hospital Association.

Q. What about home medical equipment, like glucose monitors?

A. Some sophisticated home medical machines keep dated records of readings. The date is only a recording mechanism - your glucose monitor will still read blood sugar, even if the date is wrong, Feigal explained. He calls this just a nuisance, but says consumers can call the manufacturer - the name and number should be on the machine - to ask what to expect.

Q. Will I have any difficulty getting my prescription medicine?

A. No, says the FDA. The industry typically keeps 90 days' worth of drugs on hand, so those for Jan. 1 already have been manufactured. Also, many major drug companies have boosted their year-end stockpiles, ensuring they'll have enough just in case patients overreact and try to hoard.

Do not hoard, warns the FDA, which does a weekly check of pharmacy records to make sure no one does. Refill medications like you normally would - when you have a five- to seven-day supply remaining.

Q. What if I need an ambulance?

A. If you dial 911, "someone will answer," pledged Mark Adams of the National Emergency Number Association, which next week will release a study of 911 readiness. Some 911 call centers, usually operated by local governments, may not have fixed all their programs - you may have to tell the operator your address instead of the computer immediately spotting it - but you'll get help, Adams said. Anyone concerned could keep the local police number by the phone too.

Q. What about my medical records?

A. The vast majority of doctors still use paper medical records. If yours uses computerized records, there probably is a paper copy too, but ask your doctor if he or she is Y2K compliant, Palmisano said.

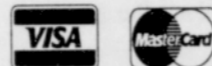
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