from theologian William F. May. They teach how to live with the unexpected. To believe that we can control who our children become and how they live their lives by employing whatever means of enhancement available is hubris. Sandel contends that such a belief brings selfishness into our dealings with one another and isolates us from the kinship of humanity. "If our genetic endowments are gifts," he explains, "rather than achievements for which we can claim credit, it is a mistake and a conceit to assume that we are entitled to the full measure of the bounty they reap in a market economy. We therefore have an obligation to share this bounty with those who, through no fault of their own, lack comparable gifts."

Genetic engineering opens the possibility of a new eugenics: "Rather than segregating and eliminating the unfit, it would improve them," Sandel says, drawing on the writings of Robert L. Sinheimer, a molecular biologist at the California Institute of Technology. As we increase the ability to manipulate life into some form of society-defined perfection, will we become less open, less generous, less compassionate, less accepting of those forms that do not meet our aspirations? How will we decide who is "unfit"?

Many years ago, I read a book by Mother Teresa, No Greater Love, in which she told about a mother of twelve whose youngest daughter was horribly mutilated and another woman in Venezuela with a severely crippled son. Mother Teresa offered to take the daughter back to her home so that the woman would be better able to care for her other eleven children. To Mother Teresa's surprise, the woman began to cry and begged her to let her child remain with the family: "This creature is the greatest gift of God to me and my family. All our love is focused on her. Our lives would be empty if you took her from us." Similarly, the woman with the crippled son said, "We call him 'Teacher of Love,' because he keeps us awake. Some sleep labs will test for this, and a home test consisting of a gauge that fits over the penis is also available. Between 31 to 52% of American men experience erectile dysfunction (ED) ("the inability to achieve or maintain an erection firm enough for intercourse") at sometime during their life, according to Basic Health Publications User's Guide to Complete Sexual Satisfaction by Victoria Dolby Toews, MPH. In some cases, the dysfunction is temporary or minimal and doesn't usually prevent intercourse. Some men, however, are unable to maintain an erection at all. In about 30% of cases, physical conditions, such as cardiovascular disease or diabetes, are the cause. Blockages in arteries can impair blood flow necessary for an erection. Nerve damage, caused by diabetes or some kind of trauma, also hamper firm erections. Although ED can certainly contribute to depression and loss of self-esteem, psychological factors are not usually its cause. One way to tell if ED is the result of physical or psychological problems is to monitor whether a man is having erections during REM sleep, a common occurrence. If he is able to have an erection while sleeping, he should be physically able to have one while awake. Some sleep labs will test for this, and a home test consisting of a gauge that fits over the penis is also available.

Toews urges men with ED to rule out serious underlying illnesses that may be contributing to ED before turning to quick fixes.  

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fixes like Viagra (sildenafil). Viagra encourages blood vessels to dilate. Originally, its manufacturer Pfizer researched it as a treatment for coronary heart disease. Although it did not help heart patients, men in the research studies reported better erections, so Pfizer changed its focus. The drug's side effects include headache, facial flushing, upset stomach, and a temporary colorblindness of the colors blue and green. Viagra must never be taken by anyone using nitrate-containing drugs as the combination can cause a life-threatening drop in blood pressure. Toews discusses a few alternatives to Viagra in her book, including the herb yohimbe and mechanical vacuum constriction devices that pull blood into the penis to form an erection. She recommends that yohimbe be used with the guidance of a health practitioner as too high a dose can cause serious side effects.


Eye Health

The value of nutritional supplements for maintaining eye health finally hit mainstream with the National Eye Institute-supported Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) involving 4,757 people, age 55-80. The report, which was published in Archives of Ophthalmology (October 2001), found that a high-dose combination of vitamin C, vitamin E, beta-carotene, and zinc reduced the incidence of advanced-stage age-related macular degeneration among persons at high risk for the disease by about 25 percent. The supplement formula was provided by the eye care company Bausch and Lomb. Macular degeneration results in the loss of central vision.

The nutrients used in AREDS are just a few of many that have beneficial effects on eye health. Bill Sardi has written a highly informative, concise resource for consumers called User's Guide to Eye Health Supplements. This small book reinforces the value of antioxidants in preserving eye health, but it also discusses several other supplements and nutrients—some of which Bausch and Lomb has added to its line of commercial vision health formulas. The yellow carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin, for example, also protect against macular degeneration. These carotenoids, found in kale and spinach, form a protective shield against harmful sunrays that reach the retina.

Sardi also discusses antioxidants that benefit eye health. Vitamin C is particularly important. It strengthens blood capillaries, preventing retinal hemorrhaging (a sign of macular degeneration). Other studies have shown that a minimum of 900 mg/day of vitamin C, taken for ten years or more, slows the formation of some types of cataracts. Vitamin C has the added benefit of regenerating oxidized glutathione molecules by donating electrons to them. Glutathione is not only a powerful antioxidant, it detoxifies. Sardi says that glutathione prevents inner-eye fluid pressure from building up by keeping the fluid drain clear of cellular debris. Increased fluid pressure can damage the optic nerve and is a sign of glaucoma.

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