**QUICK STUDIES**

**Vitamin D & Falls**

Roughly a third of all women over age 65 fall each year, and 20 to 30 percent of them suffer a serious injury like a hip fracture. Now researchers have more evidence that vitamin D could curb some falls.

Australian scientists gave vitamin D (1,000 IU a day) or a placebo to some 300 women aged 70 to 90. All had low blood levels of vitamin D (less than 24 nanograms per milliliter) and a history of having fallen the previous year. Both groups also got calcium (1,000 mg a day).

Among the women who fell only once during the one-year study, 36 percent of the placebo takers—but only 25 percent of the vitamin D takers—fell during the winter or spring. There were no differences in falls during the summer or autumn. That's not surprising, because people make less vitamin D from the sun's ultraviolet rays in the winter, and stores of vitamin D in the blood are still low in the spring, but not in the summer or autumn. Vitamin D had no impact on women who fell two or more times, possibly because they had more serious disabilities.

**What to do:** If you're middle-aged or older, take a daily supplement with 1,000 IU of vitamin D. A supplement is inexpensive and the risk of consuming too much vitamin D is low. Other studies suggest that vitamin D prevents falls by boosting muscle strength and improving balance. Vitamin D may also reduce the risk of osteoporosis, cancer, diabetes, and other illnesses.


**CHOCOLATE & BONES**

Chocolate may be bad news for bones. In a study of more than 1,000 Australian women aged 70 to 85, those who consumed chocolate at least once a day had 3 percent lower bone density than those who ate chocolate less than once a week. Chocolate eaters had less dense hip, leg, and heel bones.

The researchers speculate that the naturally occurring oxalates in chocolate may hinder the body's ability to absorb calcium, but the evidence is still murky.

**What to do:** One study isn't enough to demonstrate that chocolate weakens bones, but older women who eat chocolate daily and are at risk for osteoporosis may want to cut back.


**EXERCISE & AGING**

Inactive people may be 10 years older biologically than their active counterparts, say researchers who measured the length of telomeres in the white blood cells of more than 2,400 twins (mostly women).

Telomeres are sequences of DNA that cap chromosomes, protecting them from degrading. (Chromosomes are strands of DNA that carry genes.) Each time a cell divides, its telomeres erode, so shorter telomeres are a sign of aging.

Twins who were most active during their leisure time (they averaged half an hour of activity a day) had significantly longer telomeres than their twins who were least active (they averaged just two minutes a day).

Scientists don't know how exercise protects telomeres from erosion, but other studies suggest that activity may help by curbing inflammation and oxidative stress. Both can shorten telomere length.

**What to do:** Start moving. Any exercise is better than none.


**Lutein & Cataracts**

Women who consume more lutein (and its cousin, zeaxanthin) have a lower risk of cataracts.

Researchers tracked more than 35,000 women who were enrolled in the Women's Health Study. Those who consumed the most lutein and zeaxanthin (they averaged 6,700 micrograms a day) had an 18 percent lower risk of cataracts over the next 10 years than those who consumed the least.

The best source of lutein and zeaxanthin: green leafy vegetables.

**What to do:** It's worth eating more leafy greens like spinach and kale. Even if they don't protect your eyes, they're packed with vitamins and minerals, but not calories.
