



## Researchers call for trans fat content to be added to labels

Trans fats should be subject to the same regulations as saturated fats, researchers state in a paper published in the *British Medical Journal*. Providing a fuller breakdown of fat constituents on food labels – including trans fats – would help to reduce the rate of heart disease, they argue.

The US Food and Drug Administration has already ruled that both trans fats and saturated fats should be listed on food labels. The Food Standards Agency is

pressing for similar measures to be taken in the EU.

Alex Callaghan, Policy Officer for the British Heart Foundation, commented: 'Manufacturers and retailers should clearly label trans fats on food packaging, so that people can make informed decisions about their diet. The British Heart Foundation supports action to amend European legislation to make such labelling mandatory.'

*Guardian Unlimited, 28 July 2006*

## Over-the-counter gel could be rival for oral erectile dysfunction drugs

An over-the-counter gel to treat erectile dysfunction could be available within 3 years, said James Barder, Chief Executive of Futura Medical, which is developing a gel named MED2002 in collaboration with GlaxoSmithKline.

The drug is based on glyceryl trinitrate, which is a vasodilator used in the treatment of angina. Parallels can be drawn with the Pfizer pill Viagra (sildenafil citrate), since that was originally developed as a heart drug. It was only during

clinical trials, when certain side effects emerged, that a potential alternative indication for sildenafil citrate became apparent.

It is plausible that a non-prescription treatment for erectile dysfunction could gain a significant market share, given the potential embarrassment of seeing a GP about the problem. If released, the drug should be priced at a similar level to other over-the-counter products such as cold medications.

*The Times, 5 July 2006*

## Tony Blair highlights growing burden placed on NHS by diabetes

The failure to address bad lifestyles is putting an increasing strain on the NHS, said Tony Blair in a speech given in Nottingham.

The Prime Minister then explained that 'ten per cent of NHS resources today are used to treat diabetes' and that 'by 2010 the estimate is that this could double.'

Health care is not just about treating the sick, he argued; it is also about helping people to live healthily, which requires commitment from individuals,

companies and the Government.

'That doesn't mean you stop treating people on the NHS who smoke, or force people to do things that they don't choose in their lifestyle,' he commented. 'But it does mean that Government has to play an active role in precisely the way the enabling state should work and that is empowering people, setting the conditions in which they can choose responsibly.'

*BBC News, 26 July 2006*

## Caffeine content may not explain why coffee lowers diabetes risk

Another report has been published linking coffee consumption to a protective effect against diabetes. Intriguingly, though, the latest results, which appeared in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, suggest that caffeine is not the component responsible for the effect.



In fact, the association was found to be largely accounted for by intake of decaffeinated coffee. And other sources of caffeine investigated,

such as soft drinks, were found to have no bearing on the risk of diabetes. Magnesium and phytate were also ruled out as components

that could account for the effect.

In addition, unlike the previous studies, which did not confirm that the positive effect of coffee held

true across age and body weight groups, these results showed exactly that.

*Yahoo! News, 27 June 2006*

## Type of protein may provide early warning for type 2 diabetes

Raised levels in the blood of the protein RBP4 reliably indicate if a person has type 2 diabetes or is at risk of condition, according to research appearing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It is also suggested that treatment which reduces levels of this protein may reduce the risk of the condition developing.

Researcher Professor Barbara Kahn commented that the protein 'could play a causal role in insulin resistance in humans.' Dr Iain Frame, Research Manager for Diabetes UK, believes that the research could help scientists to better understand the condition and 'produce new ways of battling its effects.'

*BBC News, 14 June 2006*

## Growing skin around metal could improve prosthetic limbs

A team of scientists at the Centre for Biomedical Engineering, University College London, have developed a technique that encourages skin tissue to bind with metal. This revolutionary technique is known as intraosseous transcutaneous amputation prosthesis (ITAP).

With obvious implications for the field of prosthetic limbs, ITAP is not just a cosmetic advance; it will also

strengthen prostheses and improve recipients' sense of feel.

Because these prosthetic limbs are, in effect, a continuation of the skeleton, rather than being attached to a stump, pressure sores are less likely to result. In addition, the transcutaneous component has a non-stick surface that prevents bacteria from attaching and thus reduces the risk of infection.

*The Times, 3 July 2006*

## Growing numbers of people undergo surgery for obesity

The number of people undergoing stomach surgery for obesity more than trebled over a 2-year period, based on a sample of 16 hospital trusts. In 2003, 63 gastric banding and stomach stapling operations were carried out. This figure rose to 107 in 2004 and 216 in 2005.

Stomach surgery is supported by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence in people with a body mass index over 40kg/m<sup>2</sup>, or over 35kg/m<sup>2</sup> in the presence of a co-morbid condition such as diabetes.

*The Times, 8 May 2006*

## One-year voluntary regulation of junk food ads introduced

Tony Blair has announced a 1-year test to see if a voluntary code to restrict junk food advertising on TV will be effective. If it is deemed to have failed, then legislation could be introduced to regulate the broadcasting industry. This legislation could include a blanket pre-watershed ban on junk food ads.

The media regulator Ofcom has already consulted on such a ban. Opponents to this included chief executives from ITV, Channel 4 and

Five, who wrote open letters to Tessa Jowell (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport). They argued that their schedules include programmes promoting a healthy lifestyle, but that the existence of the channels depends on advertising revenue.

Ofcom estimated that a pre-watershed ban would reduce revenues by £140 million a year; the industry put the figure at around £300 million.

*Independent Online, 31 July 2006*

## Two-thirds of people with diabetes fail to take medicine as prescribed

Two-thirds of people living with diabetes in the UK fail to take their medicine as prescribed, suggests research commissioned by Diabetes UK, the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) and Ask About Medicines, the last of which is an independent campaign to increase people's involvement in decisions about their medicines use.

Several other findings were detailed in the report. Over half of people with diabetes do not fully understand the meaning of their diagnosis, for instance. In addition, one in two people with diabetes have depression, a third are unaware that heart disease is commonly associated with the condition, and a fifth develop preventable complications due to not taking their medication.

The study report calls on healthcare professionals to do more to provide appropriate information for people with diabetes.

Simon O'Neill, Director of Care and Policy for Diabetes UK, commented: 'Short-termism is a great enemy of good diabetes care. As this research shows, many people struggle to realise the importance of taking their medicines, especially if the consequences are not immediately apparent despite the fact that damage caused by not taking their medicines is irreparable.'

He drew an analogy between good diabetes management and a pension plan: 'invest now to gain benefits in the future as in both situations there is no going back.'

Richard Tiner, ABPI Medical Director, said: 'We hope the report will serve as a call to action to healthcare professionals to experiment with information prescriptions for their patients and encourage them to ask questions about their condition and treatment.'

*BBC News, 21 July 2006*

## DIABETES LITE

### From friend of the sleuth to foe of the 'sweet tooth'

Pioneered in the 19th century for crime cracking, fingerprinting may be adopted in the 21st century to help with fat fighting.

Several schools already favour fingerprinting over swipe cards in the library, presumably because even the most forgetful of pupils

would have difficulty leaving this form of identity at home. Now there are plans to extend this to school meals and to pass information on eating habits back to parents, who can then better monitor their children's diet.

*The Times, 14 June 2006*

### Skiping a meal boosts men's appetite for larger ladies

Gentlemen may prefer blondes on the whole, but if they're hungry they could be more interested in heaviness than hair colour. A *British Journal of Psychology* study compared the views of 30 students who had just eaten – beans on

toast, no doubt – and 30 who had skipped a meal. Fat women were rated more highly by hungry men.

A link between body size and perceived health has been proposed as an evolutionary explanation.

*Yahoo! News, 28 July 2006*

### Muhammad Ali plans knock-out blow in snack food market

When boxing legend Muhammad Ali said 'There are more pleasant things to do than beat up people,' is it possible that he was thinking about launching a range of healthy snacks? Perhaps not, but that is what he plans to do next year in the US, in an attempt to put obesity down for the count.

The reduced-calorie snacks will have names like 'Rumble', 'Shuffle' and 'Jabs' and will be shaped as punch bags, gloves and other boxing paraphernalia. They will be marketed in a collaboration with Mars under the brand 'GOAT Food and Beverage', where GOAT stands for 'Greatest of All Time'.

Whether the king of the ring will get the knack of snacks is going to depend on the American penchant for punching-themed provisions.

*Yahoo! News, 28 June 2006*

