

in the news

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW TO LIVE YOUR HEALTHIEST LIFE

1 sleep well, wake rested

Women are twice as likely to suffer from insomnia as men, and a new device may help determine why. The Sleeptracker Pro, which looks like and is worn like a wristwatch, records sleep and wake cycles and, thanks to a USB port connection, imports that information into your computer. The Sleeptracker program plots your sleep patterns against other factors that you input—workout times, dinner, alcohol intake, for example—to help determine what may be affecting your rest, positively and negatively. In addition the Sleeptracker Pro can be set to wake you—within an alarm window—during light sleep. Research has shown that waking from light sleep instead of deep sleep allows your body to adjust more quickly to feeling awake, helping to eliminate groggy mornings. \$149-\$179. Sleeptracker.com



win me!

2 boost your spirit and your brain

We've all heard that reading, playing chess and listening to books on tape are great ways to give your brain a boost. Now researchers have found that prayer and spiritual meditation can also step up your memory, lengthen your attention span and keep you mentally spry for decades. In their book, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (Ballantine Books, \$27, 2009) coauthors Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman discovered that focusing your thoughts on spiritual values and goals—even for just 12 minutes a day—stimulates the brain much like other tasks that involve concentration. For the best benefits work prayer or meditation into your daily routine—even brains can get flabby without regular exercise!



4 A New Weapon Against Heart Disease

Researchers have long puzzled why half of all heart attacks and strokes occur in people with normal LDL cholesterol levels. A recent study funded by AstraZeneca and led by a team from Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston may provide an important clue. In the study the cholesterol-reducing drug Crestor was found to reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and cardiovascular disease by 45 percent in people who did not have high cholesterol. The results are notable because none of the subjects, which included women and minorities, had conditions that would have typically led them to taking this type of statin drug. But all tested positive for a C-reactive protein or CRP, which is a marker for inflammation.

Statin drugs such as Crestor lower both CRP and LDL cholesterol levels, so more research is needed to determine the reason for the risk decrease. Both the CRP test and Crestor are costly, but the implications are promising. So what to do next? Ask your doctor whether the CRP test may be appropriate for you, and should you test positive, whether a statin medication could lower your risk for heart disease.

3 Life's a Bowl of (Tart) Cherries

A diet including sour cherries, which are an antioxidant-rich "super fruit," may lower key risk factors for heart disease and reduce cholesterol levels. In a University of Michigan study, obese rats fed powdered tart cherries as a 1 percent portion of their total diets saw significant decreases in body weight, fat (especially around the midsection) and cholesterol levels. The rats also experienced a reduction in overall inflammation, important because chronic inflammation has been linked to increased disease risk. The university plans a small clinical trial on humans to see if there's a similar impact. Fresh tart cherries are available in July, but for now add dried or frozen cherries, cherry juice, preserves and sauces (opt for low-sugar varieties) to your diet.



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Photos: Jason Donnelly