

The top 10 “Duh!” health and nutrition stories of 2016



duh

də/

exclamation informal

used to comment on an action perceived as foolish or stupid, or a statement perceived as obvious.

From time to time, I call *Intelligent Medicine* listeners' and readers' attention to “Duh!” health and nutrition stories—reports so spectacularly obvious that they inspire me to highlight their archness. Here are ten of this year's stories that thoroughly deserve “Duh” designation:



1) It's possible to reverse type 2 diabetes in some people and it's not even that difficult. Duh! Is this a revelation? For over thirty years, I've been normalizing the blood sugars of Hoffman Center patients and weaning them off diabetes drugs with their attendant side effects. Researchers at Newcastle University appeared thunderstruck after demonstrating that putting patients on a rigorous diet reversed their diabetes. It's as if they've discovered a magical, new experimental approach—when diet, exercise, and the use of certain nutraceuticals almost never fail to bring blood sugar under control if only Type 2 diabetics receive the proper guidance

and encouragement.

2) Mediterranean Diet helpful for heart and stroke patients. It's been 25 years since I developed the similar Salad and Salmon Diet for patients with cardiovascular disease. Researchers report that, "After adjusting for other factors that might affect the results, we found that every one unit increase in the Mediterranean Diet Score was associated with a seven percent reduction in the risk of heart attacks, strokes or death from cardiovascular or other causes in patients with existing heart disease." Which makes the Mediterranean Diet far more effective than our current strategy of using statin drugs for prevention. The surprise was that the Mediterranean Diet had a powerful, medicine-like effect; consumption of healthy foods even mitigated the harmful effects of junk food.

3) Fresh fruit intake associated with lower cardiovascular disease risk. It's true: An apple a day keeps the cardiologist away. Many studies in the West have shown this; now this huge study in China confirms it. Interestingly, while fruit-consuming Chinese were heavier than their non-fruit eating counterparts, they had less heart disease.

4) Living amidst nature makes you live longer. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, said it 2500 years ago: "Nature itself is the best physician". How do you say "Duh" in Ancient Greek?

5) Loneliness is bad for your health. George R.R. Martin, the author of *Game of Thrones*, said it best: "When the snows fall and the white winds blow, the lone wolf dies but the pack survives." Humans are social animals, and family, friendship and community are essential features of those Blue Zones where people achieve unprecedented longevity. What was surprising was the extent to which loneliness and social isolation drove cardiovascular disease risk—up 50%, putting them on a par with smoking. The researchers postulate we may be in the midst of a public health emergency: "Given projected increases in levels of social isolation and loneliness in Europe and North

America, medical science needs to squarely address the ramifications for physical health.”

6) Doctors often overestimate the promise of new drugs. Yes, we do. The pharmaceutical industry has done a great job indoctrinating doctors to be early, enthusiastic adopters of drug “breakthroughs.” Only rarely do new meds fulfill their promise. Often, after hasty approval, dangerous side effects emerge years later after millions of patients have taken them. I say “Don’t be the first kid on the block to take a new drug.” Wait at least a couple of years until its efficacy and safety has been established.

7) Exercise keeps you young. My approach to life has been successfully premised on this obvious principle—has yours? Active seniors have better cardiovascular health; they stave off the inevitable loss of muscle mass that occurs with aging (sarcopenia); they have better brain function; they maintain sexual performance; their bones are stronger; they are less susceptible to osteoarthritis; and exercise may even reduce wrinkles and skin aging.

8) Toxic friendships can make you physically ill. Self-help guru Bryant McGill may have said it best: “Toxic relationships are dangerous to your health; they will literally kill you. Stress shortens your lifespan. Even a broken heart can kill you. There is an undeniable mind-body connection. Your arguments and hateful talk can land you in the emergency room or in the morgue. You were not meant to live in a fever of anxiety; screaming yourself hoarse in a frenzy of dreadful, panicked fight-or-flight that leaves you exhausted and numb with grief. You were not meant to live like animals tearing one another to shreds. Don’t turn your hair gray. Don’t carve a roadmap of pain into the sweet wrinkles on your face. Don’t lay in the quiet with your heart pounding like a trapped, frightened creature. For your own precious and beautiful life, and for those around you – seek help or get out before it is too late. This is your wake-up call!”

9) Lowering cholesterol with vegetable oils may not make you live longer. It's taken a long time for science to challenge the old shibboleth that vegetable oils are preferable to butter and saturated fats. In fact, venerable health authorities like the USDA and the American Heart Association still perpetuate that myth. New studies now demonstrate the folly of these anachronistic recommendations: While substituting vegetable oil for saturated fat appears to reduce heart risk because it slightly lowers "bad" LDL cholesterol, conscientious researchers finally asked the right question: did lowered cholesterol actually translate to real-life cardiovascular benefits? Upon testing, the answer was a resounding no! The harmful effects of the Omega 6-laden vegetable oils on the arteries outweighed their putative benefits on lipid profiles. Duh!

10) Does a Western diet increase the risk for Alzheimer's? Why is Alzheimer's Disease so prevalent in Western, industrialized countries? Is it simply because we're living longer? No, the answer most certainly lies in our Western diets, full of sugar, refined carbohydrates, gluten, synthetic chemical ingredients like MSG, and poor quality oils and fat substitutes. Of course, the surge in dementia diagnoses perfectly parallels the dramatic uptick in diabetes and obesity, which should have been a clue all along.

Why it takes medical science so long to "prove" these obvious realities is beyond me. Does it really require all those expensive research studies to convince us of the truth that's right before our eyes? Well, so much the better—it's likely that wonky scientists will continue to provide us with rich fodder for "Duh!" stories like these for many years to come!