

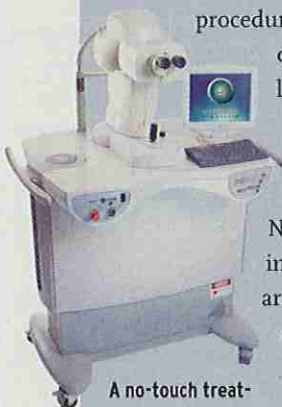
BY RACHEL RABKIN, CHRISTINE BROPHY AND NORINE DWORIN

Medical Updates



NEW SIGHT SAVER

FEAR OF HAVING SHARP INSTRUMENTS near your eyes is no longer a reason to avoid getting refractive eye surgery for farsightedness. A new “no-touch” technique is now being used to correct this problem. Hyperion LTK has developed an FDA-approved laser procedure in which the cornea is reshaped without cutting or removing corneal tissue. The Sunrise LTK procedure, performed in the ophthalmologist’s office, takes about three seconds of laser time per eye. “The initial response is quite immediate and dramatic,” said Sandra Belmont, M.D., director of the Laser Vision Center at the New York Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York City. She said that the results are also safe enough to get both eyes treated the same day. Because no tissue is cut and no instruments are used to touch the eye, the risk for complications, infections and healing irregularities are minimized.



A no-touch treatment may improve eyesight with few complications or infections.

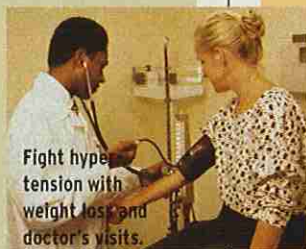
PREVENT SPIDER VEINS

IF YOU’VE BEEN HIDING YOUR LEGS BECAUSE OF UNSIGHTLY spider veins, you’re not alone. Forty-one percent of women between the ages of 40 and 50 have them. While genetics do play a role in developing spider veins, research shows that you can lower your risk for getting them. The American Academy of Dermatology suggests keeping weight under control, exercising regularly and wearing support hose. John F. Romano, M.D., a New York City dermatologist and member of the FAMILY CIRCLE Health and Medical Advisory Board, also cautions that hormone-replacement therapy aggravates spider veins. Further, reports show that birth control pills and pregnancy may make spider veins worse. Talk to your doctor to see if any of these factors might apply to you.

If you’re looking to get rid of existing spider veins, a treatment called sclerotherapy can help. In this procedure, a hardening solution is injected into the vein, causing the vessel to collapse. According to Dr. Romano, this procedure is at least 75 percent effective. While spider veins do not pose a serious medical risk, varicose veins, which are larger and deeper, can lead to blood clots or ulcers. Varicose veins also respond to sclerotherapy.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE CUT

COMBINING WEIGHT LOSS AND EXERCISE LOWERS BLOOD pressure more than exercise alone, according to research done at the Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina. The study of 133 overweight men and women with untreated hypertension found that about 30 minutes of exercise three to four times weekly for six months reduced blood pressure, and weight loss lowered it even more. About 50 million Americans suffer from hypertension, which can lead to stroke, heart and kidney disease. “These findings provide evidence that nondrug approaches can be effective in treating hypertension,” says study author James Blumenthal, Ph.D. To help prevent high blood pressure (levels greater than 140/90), exercise, limit sodium, reduce calories if you are overweight and get your blood pressure checked annually or as advised by your doctor.



Fight hypertension with weight loss and doctor's visits.

SOAP CAN MAKE YOU SICK

YOU MAY THINK THAT SCRUBBING AWAY BACTERIA WITH antibacterial soaps will prevent you from getting ill, but new research indicates just the opposite. The American Medical Association’s (AMA) Council on Scientific Affairs found that there is no scientific evidence that antibacterial products with antimicrobial chemicals have any infection-fighting benefits. While antimicrobial chemicals (found in household cleaners, skin-care products, hand lotions and soaps) do destroy bacteria on contact, researchers fear that these chemicals will enhance the development of drug-resistant bacteria. According to Myron Genel, M.D., past chairman to the AMA Council on Scientific Affairs, every household harbors both good and bad bacteria. Ironically, the use of these products may inadvertently aid in the emergence of resistant (bad) bacteria, partly by destroying good bacteria. Bad bacteria may then infect susceptible individuals and contribute to antibiotic resistance.

PHOTOS, TOP TO BOTTOM: COURTESY OF SUNRISE TECHNOLOGIES (2); CHRIS JONES/THE STOCK MARKET

Food & Your Health What You Need to Know

SUPPLEMENT SENSE

BEFORE HEADING TO THE HEALTH-FOOD STORE, do your homework—it's easy to be misled by dietary-supplement labels. Larry Augsburger, Ph.D., former president of the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists, says there is currently no clear way for consumers to determine supplement quality. Often, labels do not accurately indicate a product's efficacy and potential side effects. Dr. Augsburger offers these tips for judging products:

- *Notice who makes the product.* Is it a reputable firm? Does the label list the manufacturer or the distributor? If this is unclear, you may want to go to the product's Web page or speak to a pharmacist.
- *Look at the pills for signs of poor quality.* Do they have spots? Do they crumble easily? Drop a pill in a glass. Does it disintegrate too slowly? These are all indications that the pills might be formulated poorly.
- *Look for pills that have the United States Pharmacopeia (USP) seal of approval.* The USP provides public standards for drug products and some supplements.



GRAPEFRUIT JUICE DANGER

WHILE GRAPEFRUIT JUICE IS loaded with vitamin C, drinking too much may increase your risk of kidney stones. A study conducted by the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston determined that every 3-ounce serving of grapefruit juice a day increased kidney stone risk by 44 percent. Researchers note that the best way to reduce your risk is to up your intake of other fluids, and carefully choose the beverages you consume.

BETA-CAROTENE AND CANCER RISK

IF YOU SMOKE, THE BEST WAY TO REDUCE YOUR RISK FOR LUNG cancer is to kick the habit. However, if you don't plan on stopping soon, you should be extremely cautious when taking supplements with beta-carotene. A new study from the Cancer Research Campaign (CRC) in the United Kingdom concludes that vitamin supplements with large doses of beta-carotene can increase a smoker's risk of lung cancer. This research confirms the results of a Finnish study that claimed beta-carotene supplements can boost the risk of lung cancer in smokers by 18 percent. But that shouldn't stop you from eating foods that contain beta-carotene naturally. The CRC's director general, Professor Gordon McVie, notes that eating foods with vitamins in them is good for you. Xiang-Dong Wang, M.D., Ph.D., an associate professor of nutrition and researcher at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston, agrees that smokers' increased risk of lung cancer is associated with the supplement form of beta-carotene, not the type in food. He says that low doses of beta-carotene (2 to 6 mg) cause no damage to lung tissue, but he adds that supplementation of high doses (30 mg) can lead to an increase in precancerous lung-tissue lesions. Beta-carotene is found naturally in tomatoes, carrots and yellow vegetables and fruits. Another reason to look no further than your local fruit stand: A study in the February 2000 *Thorax* reports that eating five or more apples a week improves lung function.



Eat foods with beta-carotene, such as tomatoes, but think twice about supplements.

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