

## NewsBites

### Most Cough Medicines Don't Work

**G**OT A COUGH? Think twice before you reach for an over-the-counter cough medicine, cautions the American College of Chest Physicians in new evidence-based guidelines published in *Chest*. "There is no clinical evidence that over-the-counter cough expectorants or suppressants actually relieve cough," said guidelines chair Richard S. Irwin, MD, FCCP, of the University of Massachusetts Medical School. What does work? Surprisingly, older antihistamines, such as Benadryl (diphenhydramine)—which can cause drowsiness—and/or decongestants such as Sudafed (pseudoephedrine).

The guidelines also strongly recommend that adults up to 65 years old receive a new adult vaccine for whooping cough (pertussis). "Most of us think of whooping cough as a childhood disease, yet 28% of whooping cough cases in the US are in adults," Dr. Irwin pointed out. "Although most of us were vaccinated against whooping cough when we were children, the older vaccine only gives protection for less than 10 years." Unlike that original vaccine, which caused serious side effects in adults, the new vaccine is safe for older patients.

**TO LEARN MORE:** *Chest*, January 2006; <[www.chestnet.org/about/press/releases/2006/010906a.php](http://www.chestnet.org/about/press/releases/2006/010906a.php)>

### Even Moderate Exercise Staves Off Arthritis Decline

**E**VEN A LITTLE BIT of exercise can help prevent disability from arthritis, according to a new Northwestern University study. Researchers followed 3,554 adults ages 53-63 with osteoarthritis, the most common form of the ailment, taking part in the Health and Retirement Study. They divided participants into three groups based on their reported leisure activities at the study's start: inactive, "insufficiently active" and those getting the recommended amount of exercise for adults—at least 30 minutes of moderate activity or 20 minutes of vigorous exercise on most days of the week.

Over a two-year span, the most

active group proved 41% less likely to show functional decline—problems with daily tasks such as walking, climbing stairs and doing basic chores—than the inactive group. But the risk reduction was almost as great—38%—for the arthritis patients in the middle, "insufficiently active" group.

"Given the high prevalence of arthritis," concluded lead author Joe Feinglass, PhD, "even modest increases in rates of lifestyle physical activity among older adults could make a substantial contribution to disability-free life expectancy."

**TO LEARN MORE:** *Arthritis Care & Research*, Dec. 7, 2005; free abstract at <[www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/112193115/ABSTRACT](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/112193115/ABSTRACT)>.

### Minnesota Ranks Healthiest, Dontcha Know

**M**AYBE there's an upside to the cold weather: Minnesota, according to the 16th annual "America's Health Rankings" report, is the healthiest state in the US, followed by Vermont, New Hampshire, Utah and Hawaii. Minnesota has ranked number-one for 10 of the 16 years of the rankings. The least healthy state is Mississippi, with Louisiana and Tennessee near the bottom.

The rankings are compiled by the United Health Federation, the American Public Health Association and the Partnership for Prevention, based on public health statistics such as rates of smoking, immunization, infant mortality, and cardiovascular and cancer deaths. The report noted that the improvement of Americans' overall health, which in the 1990s gained dra-

matically, has slowed to a crawl. Much of the blame goes to obesity, which has doubled in the last 15 years.

**TO LEARN MORE:** <[www.unitedhealthfoundation.org/shr2005/Findings.html](http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org/shr2005/Findings.html)>

### Healthy Aging? Yes, You Can

**T**HERE'S HOPE for healthy aging, at least based on an in-depth look at seniors in one Utah county. Since 1995, Duke University's Cache County Memory Study has been following nearly everybody age 65 or older in this Utah county, which has one of the US' highest conditional life expectancies at age 65. The latest findings, published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, analyzed 10 different dimensions of healthy aging.

"With few exceptions, 80-90% of persons aged 65 to 75 were healthy according to each measure used," the researchers concluded. Although reported excellent or good health decreased with age, to 60% in those 85 and older, "even in the oldest old, the majority of respondents

were independent in activities of daily living." The factors most associated with seniors' positive health perceptions were vision, hearing and mood—all "potentially modifiable," the researchers noted, which clinical and public health screenings can address.

While there are no guarantees for healthy aging, said lead author Kathleen A. Welsh-Bohmer, PhD, you can improve your odds with a healthy diet, exercise, regular checkups, adequate rest and maintaining good social networks.

**TO LEARN MORE:** *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, February 2006; free abstract online at <[www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1532-5415.2005.00583.x](http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1532-5415.2005.00583.x)>. ♦