editorial comments



Genetically engineered mice that develop malignant tumors will be available to researchers in university and government laboratories early this year. Marketed by Du Pont, the 'Onco-Mouse' was developed by two Harvard University professors who received the first US animal patent, according to the Associated Press story in the Nov 16 Chicago Tribune.

The first available mice will carry the "ras" oncogene and are expected to assist researchers in following the growth of breast cancer. In addition, the genetically engineered rodents have the potential to be used in testing specific substances to determine if they cause cancer.

Other mice carrying different oncogenes are expected later in the year.

Estrogen levels may influence a woman's ability to perform spatial and verbal tasks.

Researchers at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, found women performed better on verbal skills and muscle coordination tasks when estrogen levels were high. Conversely, low estrogen levels elicited better performances on such spatial problems as mentally rotating objects drawn on paper.

The two studies involved 200 women. Noted differences were based on averages.

They were reported at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience in Toronto held in November.

One of the researchers, Doreen

Kimura, PhD, theorizes that fluctuating hormones probably influence the right and left brain functions. Any changes that may occur because of hormonal fluctuations should cause no serious problems in the women who experience them, according to Dr. Kimura.

The tests were not performed prior to menstruation. Noted Dr. Kimura, "The cognitive changes we see are not attributable to mood changes. They are not related in any way to premenstrual syndrome."

Weight gain will average seven pounds over 10 years in Americans in their 20s and early 30s, according to a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study. Women gain weight faster than men until both reach their mid-50s when weight declines for each sex.

This first large study to analyze long-time weight patterns involved approximately 10,000 people. Weight was checked at two times a decade apart. During that time 4% of the men and 8% of the women gained more than 30 pounds.

Addressing the annual meeting of the American Heart Association in Washington, one of the researchers, David Williamson, MD, said, "The advice from this study is that young people in their 20s should be concerned about their weight and avoid gaining a few pounds a year. Maybe even poeple in their late teens should be concerned."

While reduced caloric intake

and increased exercise prevent weight gain, Dr. Williamson suggested another way to keep off extra pounds: "To lose weight, people should avoiding eating fats. They may not even have to reduce overall food intake if they cut down on fats."

Cholesterol's role in cardiac disease continues to be debated. Speaking at the annual American Heart Association held in Washington in November, several presenters revealed their somewhat controversial findings, a few of which are highlighted here:

- · The same risk factors that apply to the general population do not seem to apply to Mexican-American men. Yet women from that ethnic group exhibit a generally higher risk of cardiac death than their male counterparts, according to a study conducted at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. This conclusion contradicts other comparative studies, which found Mexican-Americans at higher risk for cardiac events when traditional risk factors are considered.
- The same study found Native Americans may be protected against heart disease despite the propensity toward obesity and diabetes rates within this population.
- General cholesterol guidelines may need revising, according to Thomas Pearson, MD, of Mary Imogene Bassett Hospital (Coop-

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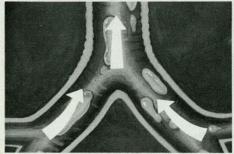
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Brief Summary

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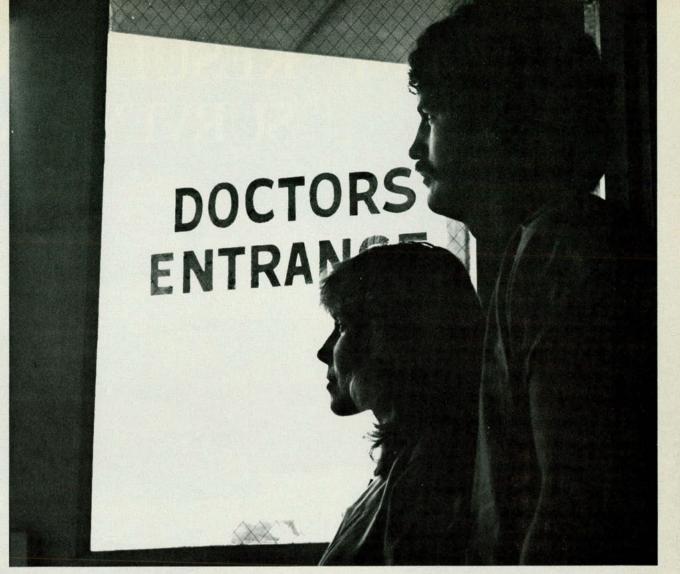
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erstown, NY) and Michael Miller, MD, from Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, MD). Their statement was based on a significant number of cases in which patients died from cardiac disease despite having cholesterol levels within the accepted range. Dr. Pearson said knowing the cholesterol profile may be more important than just knowing the total numbers.

Patients being fed glucose parenterally should receive thiamine supplementation even if a complete multivitamin intravenous supplement is not available. This warning from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which was issued in early November, was prompted by the deaths of three patients who were receiving intravenous feedings.

The multivitamin preparation normally added to the glucose mixture had been in short supply when production in one of the leading manufacturer's plants was scaled back after the FDA found problems in the production process. A spokesperson for the manufacturer said the problem was corrected and a large amount of the multivitamin had already been produced.

Alpha interferon received approval from the Food and Drug Administration for AIDS patients with Kaposi's sarcoma. According to FDA commissioner, Frank Young, MD, drug efficacy depends upon early treatment in those patients with "fairly good immune systems." Up to 45% of patients receiving alpha interferon in trials experienced significant reduction in tumor size. To date, life expectancy has been extended by approximately one year in the alpha interferon recipients.



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- Results based on 6,831 physician responses to a recent survey (note: Not all responding physicians answered all guestions). Data on file. Beecham
- Laboratories, Pathogenesis, consequences, and approaches to Weiss ST: Obesity: Pathogenesis, consequences, and approaches to treatment. Psychiatr Clin North Am 1984;7:307-319.

 Eastman P: Call obesity "a killer", costing the US \$30.6 billion a year. Medical Tribune 1985;(March 20):26.