

Many physicians discontinue treating patients for elevated systolic pressure though results of two trials show that reducing systolic pressure has a major impact on stroke and cardiovascular disease.

Results of the Systolic Hypertension in the Elderly Program and the Systolic Hypertension in Europe trial indicate that lowering systolic pressure in people with readings above 160 mm Hg with normal diastolic pressure reduces risk of cardiovascular events. Researchers note that many physicians believe higher systolic pressure can be ignored in favor of maintaining lower diastolic pressure because of undergoing training when results of the Framingham Heart Study—which indicated an increased cardiovascular risk for people with elevated diastolic pressure—were published. Current results indicate that diastolic pressure is only important as an indicator for risk in patients under 50 years of age.

The findings were presented in November at the Canadian Cardiovascular Society in Vancouver, Canada.

Nesiritide reduced and maintained pulmonary capillary wedge pressure in patients with acute decompensated heart failure, without the dose escalation that occurs with nitroglycerine, report researchers who conducted the Vasodilation in the Management of Acute Congestive Heart Failure study.

The study, which compared results of nesiritide (Natrecor) with nitroglycerine and with placebo, involved 498 patients hospitalized for acute decompensated heart failure. End points were a reduction in pulmonary artery pressure and improvement in symptoms with observation over 24, 36, and 48 hours. Nesiritide is an analog of a hormone secreted in the heart in response to congestive heart failure.

Acute decompensated heart failure is considered the only growing problem in

cardiovascular diseases in the United States, according to scientists who presented study results at the 73rd annual scientific session of the American Heart Association.

An organic pesticide produces symptoms of Parkinson's disease in animal studies, confirming the hypothesis that an environmental toxin is a factor in the disease, indicate results of a study. Rotenone—a pesticide produced by plants—is marketed as an organic garden pesticide and flea powder and is also used by fisheries in lakes.

Previous studies indicated that damage to dopamine-producing cells was accompanied by blockage of an enzyme called complex one. Rotenone is a complex one inhibitor.

Parkinson's disease affects nearly 1 million Americans over 50 years of age. People who work on farms or live in the country have seven times the risk of having the disease as others.

The report can be found in the December issue of *Nature Neuroscience*.

In clinical trials of leukemia drug STI-571, 90% of patients in the first phase of myeloid leukemia went into remission, and 63% of patients in the second phase went into remission.

The manufacturer-financed trials involved 530 patients with first phase- and 230 patients with second phase chronic myeloid leukemia. STI-571 (Glivec) works by blocking a signal sent by the abnormal protein that causes the disease.

The current procedure of bone marrow transplant has a mortality rate of 40% and is only successful in half of cases. Currently used drugs help maintain patients but do not decrease the number of white blood cells, and interferon extends patients' lives

by 2 years, but has significant side effects.

The drug is expected to be marketed in June 2000. Patients currently wishing to receive the drug have to enroll in a clinical trial.

The findings were presented December 4 at a meeting of the American Society of Hematology.

Patients who undergo surgery for abdominal aortic aneurysms smaller than 5.5 cm have the same outcome as patients who are regularly monitored, indicate results of the Veteran Affairs' Aneurysm Detection and Management study designed to aid doctors in assessing the point at which the danger of the aneurysm rupturing outweighs the risk associated with abdominal aortic aneurysms.

Researchers followed up 1136 male veterans between the ages of 50 and 79 years for 5 years. Patients with abdominal aortic aneurysms between 4.0 and 5.5 cm were randomly assigned to one of three groups either having surgery or followed up using ultrasound or computed tomography to monitor size, the strongest predictor of rupture.

After 8 years, the number of deaths of patients who had surgery approximated the number in the group monitored regularly.

The report was presented at the 73rd annual scientific session of the American Heart Association.

Older adults infected with herpes simplex virus type 1 have twice the risk of heart attack and heart attack death as those not infected, say scientists who conducted the Cardiovascular Health Study.

The study compared 213 patients 65 years of age who had myocardial infarction and coronary heart disease with 405 con-

trols. The presence of immunoglobulin (Ig) G antibodies to herpes simplex virus type 1 was associated with a twofold risk of myocardial infarction and coronary heart disease.

The report can be found at www.docguide.com.

Children with severe Crohn's disease who had not responded to conventional therapy showed significant improvement and were able to decrease steroid therapy 4 weeks after infusion of infliximab. Infliximab (Remicade), a member of the monoclonal antibody class of drugs, works by blocking a biologic response mediator called tumor necrosis factor alpha.

The study involved 15 patients with severe Crohn's disease—defined by their inability to discontinue steroids and their lack of response to immunomodulators—who were given one infusion of infliximab and followed up for 12 months. Ninety-four percent of the patients achieved significant decreases in disease activity after 4 weeks, and 67% were in complete remission after 10 weeks. Children with early disease had a prolonged response to the drug compared with those diagnosed for more than 2 years. No serious side effects were reported.

Approximately 400,000 people have Crohn's disease, and 30% have fistulas. One in 800 children has the disease, usually presenting between 12 and 16 years of age.

The report can be found in the November issue of *American Journal of Gastroenterology*.

Patients with HIV infection treated with protease inhibitors (PI) have a higher risk of carotid vessel lesions than infected patients not receiving PI treatment.

Scientists from the University of Bari in Italy studied 102 HIV-infected patients, half of whom had undergone PI treatment. Of those who had PI treatment, 52.7% had lesions of the vascular wall, while those who had no PI treatment had a rate of 14.9%. A strong relationship was observed between carotid disease and smoking and hypertriglyceridemia. Previous studies had also indicated an increased risk of cere-

brovascular disease and incidents of stroke in patients with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

Scientists are considering recommending that a periodic ultrasonographic study of the vascular wall and use of PI-sparing combination modes of therapy be included in patient management.

The report can be found in the November 10 issue of *AIDS*.

Carbonated soda consumption by children and adolescents may negatively affect the adequacy of their nutrient intake, indicate results of a survey that assessed the relationship of beverage choice (that is, milk, 100% juice, fruit-flavored drinks, or carbonated sodas) and nutrient intake.

Data for approximately 4000 children in age groups of 2 to 5, 6 to 11, and 12 to 17 years were studied. Of children aged 2 to 5 years, 34% drank soda, while that percentage rose to 65% for children between 12 and 17 years of age.

Scientists found that among soda drinkers, children between 2 and 17 years were less likely to consume recommended levels of vitamin A; children 12 years and under were less likely to consume the recommended amount of calcium; and children 6 years and older were at risk for magnesium deficiency.

Scientists advise substituting one serving of soda with milk or 100% juice to increase daily nutrient intake.

The report can be found in the November issue of *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*.

A study failed to show that high-dose fluvastatin prevents acute myocardial infarction events after 1 year, report researchers from the University Hospital Groningen, the Netherlands, who conducted the Fluvastatin on Risk Diminishing after Acute Myocardial Infarction study.

The study—designed to determine if statin therapy could affect endothelial function—involved 550 patients with acute myocardial infarction who were placed on a Holter monitor to measure ischemia. Patients given 80 mg/d of fluvastatin showed no evidence of reduction of events

or ischemia after 1 year compared with placebo.

The report was presented at the 73rd annual scientific session of the American Heart Association.

A levonorgestrel-releasing intrauterine system appears to offer protection from endometrial pathologies in women receiving tamoxifen, report scientists from the University of Leicester, UK.

Researchers randomly assigned 122 postmenopausal women who had treatment with tamoxifen for 1 year to one of two groups who had endometrial surveillance alone or surveillance plus placement of the levonorgestrel intrauterine system, which releases 20µg/d of levonorgestrel into the uterine cavity.

All women fitted with the intrauterine system had a uniform decidual response and did not form new polyps. In addition, 13% had fewer fibroids compared with the control group. Women in the treatment group had more days of bleeding compared with the control group.

The report can be found in the November issue of *Lancet*. ♦