Diabetes on the rise, study finds

NEW YORK (Reuters) -- More than one out of every three individuals in the United States has diabetes or impaired fasting glucose, a condition that increases the risk of developing diabetes, new study findings suggest.

The prevalence of diagnosed diabetes has increased in recent years, while undiagnosed diabetes and impaired fasting glucose has remained constant over the past decade.

"Despite public health messages, we're not finding a counterbalance of fewer people with undiagnosed diabetes," study co-author Dr. Catherine C. Cowie, of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, in Bethesda, Maryland, told Reuters.

The findings are based on an analysis of four years of data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). The study included information on 4,761 adults, age 20 years or older, who were classified according to their glycemic status. Cowie and her team compared data from the 1999-2002 with data from 1988-1994.

More than 35 percent of study participants, representing 73.3 million individuals had diabetes or impaired fasting glucose in 2002, the researchers report in the journal Diabetes Care. A total 9.3 percent had diabetes in 1988-2002 and the prevalence of undiagnosed remained stable at 2.8 percent during this period.

However, the prevalence of diagnosed diabetes rose from 5.1 percent in 1988-1994 to 6.5 percent in 1999-2002. They also estimate that about one third of diabetics are undiagnosed.

"We were surprised by the fact that diagnosed diabetes is increasing," Cowie said. "We need to do a better job of diagnosing those one in three who don't know they have it (diabetes) and finding those with impaired fasting glucose."

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Find this article at:
Study backs high-dose flu vaccines for elderly

CHICAGO, Illinois (Reuters) -- Elderly people, whose immune responses typically weaken with age, can be safely protected against common influenza with doses of vaccine that are up to four times stronger than usual, researchers said Monday.

The report from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, said most reactions to the more potent doses of vaccine were mild. The biggest complaints involved discomfort, redness or swelling at the site of the injection in those who got the strongest shots.

But increasing the strength of the vaccine also brought consistent improvements in immune responses, concluded the study published in the current Archives of Internal Medicine.

The elderly "are among the most vulnerable to serious complications of influenza because they generally have more underlying diseases and weaker immune systems than younger people," said Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which financed the study.

"These findings are an important first step in developing new strategies to better protect the elderly against influenza-associated hospitalizations and mortality," he added.

In the United States seasonal flu causes 36,000 deaths and more than 200,000 hospitalizations every year, affecting up to 20 percent of the population.

The Baylor study involved 202 adults with an average age of 77 who received seasonal flu vaccine at normal doses and at doses twice and four times more potent than normal.

Blood tests showed that those who had received the strongest dose had 44 to 79 percent higher levels of flu antibody after they were inoculated than did those who received the normal dose of vaccine, the study found.

Find this article at:
http://www.cnn.com/2006/HEALTH/conditions/05/22/flu.vaccines.reut/index.html
Antidepressants could help stroke victims from the start

CHICAGO, Illinois (AP) -- Doctors may want to give stroke victims antidepressants right away instead of waiting until they develop depression, a common complication, new research suggests.

Experts imagine high-risk people taking meds to ward off depression just as people take cholesterol drugs today.

The findings may lead to an expanded use for antidepressants. Someday high-risk people such as stroke patients might take the drugs before suffering depression -- just as people now take cholesterol drugs to prevent heart attacks, the lead author said.

The researchers gave low doses of the antidepressant Lexapro to stroke patients. The patients on the drug were 4.5 times less likely to develop depression than patients taking a dummy pill.

More than 700,000 Americans suffer strokes each year and more than one-third will develop depression in the next two years. Stroke patients with depression recover more slowly and are more likely to die, according to previous research.

"We showed you could in fact prevent the development of depression after stroke," said Dr. Robert Robinson of the University of Iowa who led the study. "I hope I don't have a stroke, but if I do, I would certainly want to be placed on an antidepressant."

Experts say strokes may damage parts of the brain affecting mood. Add to that the stress of relearning simple tasks and adjusting to stroke-caused impairments and you've got a recipe for depression.

Lexapro may work by making the chemical serotonin more available in the brain and by promoting brain repair, said Dr. George Bartzokis of the University of California, Los Angeles, who was not involved in the new study.

"Treating the depression may actually help treat the stroke and vice versa," Bartzokis said.

The study, appearing in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association, was based on an analysis of 176 stroke patients, ranging in age from 50 to 90.

At the start, none suffered from depression. One-third were randomly assigned to take Lexapro. One-third took matching dummy pills. And one-third were assigned to receive talk therapy focusing on problem-solving skills.

After one year, about 9 percent of the Lexapro group had developed depression. That compared to 22 percent of the placebo-takers and 12 percent of the people who got problem-solving therapy.

Side effects such as dry mouth, dizziness, rapid heart rate and sexual problems were reported by all three groups at about the same rates.

Dr. Charles Reynolds, a geriatric psychiatrist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, said he hopes doctors will start prescribing preventive antidepressants to stroke patients.

"Depression in the wake of a stroke amplifies the suffering and disability such patients experience," Reynolds said. "Dr. Robinson's work supports a novel way of preventing such suffering and disability."

But with prevention, some patients take pills who never would have needed them, putting them at risk for unnecessary side effects. Seven stroke patients would have to be treated with antidepressants to prevent one depression, the researchers found.

Robinson said that's acceptable, especially when compared to the current standards in heart attack prevention. He cited a study showing it takes 40 male patients taking cholesterol-lowering statins over five years to prevent just one heart attack.

The researchers excluded from the study patients who had cancer, other life-threatening conditions or severe verbal impairments, so the findings may not apply to all stroke patients.

The research was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health.

Find this article at:
Denmark 'happiest' country in the world

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Denmark is the world's most content nation, according to a new study on global wellbeing, but the good news is, despite the credit crunch and rising fuel and food prices, all of us are getting happier.

Denmark's prosperity and democratic systems are seen as key to its contentment.

Researchers at the University of Michigan said Denmark's prosperity, stability and democratic government placed the country at the top of the rankings, with Colombia, Canada, Puerto Rico and Iceland all in the top 10.

The United States -- the world's richest nation -- ranked 16th among 97 countries, while Britain was placed 21st.

Zimbabwe, with its soaring inflation and continuing political crisis, unsurprisingly ranked 97th.

"I strongly suspect there is a strong correlation between peace and happiness," said Ronald Inglehart, a political scientist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research.

Almost all the countries at the bottom of the list struggle with legacies of authoritarian rule and widespread poverty, the survey found.

Moldova and Armenia -- with long histories of repressive government -- trumped Iraq for misery, which placed seven in the U.S.-funded research.

Respondents were asked two questions to gauge their happiness:
- Taking all things together, would you say you are very happy, rather happy, not very happy, or not at all happy?
- All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?

Researchers say that compared to a similar survey 20 years ago, everyone is a lot happier.

"Ultimately, the most important determinant of happiness is the extent to which people have free choice in how to live their lives," Inglehart adds.

Find this article at: http://www.cnn.com/2008/HEALTH/07/02/nations.happiness/index.html
Terrorism fears are fading

(CNN) -- As Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama battle over who has the best approach to national security, a new CNN poll finds Americans' concerns about terrorism have hit an all-time low for the post-September 11 era.

A poll finds fewer Americans fear an imminent terror attack than at any time since September 11, 2001.

According to a CNN/Opinion Research Corp. survey released Wednesday, 35 percent of Americans believe a terrorist attack somewhere in the United States is likely over the next several weeks.

The figure is the lowest in a CNN poll since the September 11, 2001, al Qaeda attacks, which killed nearly 3,000 people.

Between 2002 and 2006, summertime polls typically showed that a majority of Americans believed that a terrorist attack was likely. Last summer, that figure dropped to 41 percent. This summer, it dropped another 6 percentage points.

The latest CNN poll also indicates that the war in Iraq remains deeply unpopular. Three in 10 voters favor the war, while 68 percent oppose it. Similarly, a third of voters would like to see the next president keep the same number of troops in Iraq that are stationed there now. See how the poll numbers stack up »

For McCain, who is seeking to highlight his national security credentials and has staunchly defended the U.S. presence in Iraq, the latest poll results may not be viewed in a positive light.

"Sen. McCain's greatest strength is in foreign policy, particularly his reputation as the candidate best able to fight the war on terror," said Keating Holland, CNN's polling director.

"As the threat of a terrorist attack continues to recede in the mind of the American voter, the state of the economy and other domestic issues are likely to become even more important. That would be good news for Sen. Obama, since the Democrats currently beat or tie the Republicans on every issue except terrorism."

Another potential problem for McCain may be found in President Bush's latest job approval ratings.

According to the survey, 30 percent of Americans approve of how Bush is handling his job, while 68 percent disapprove of Bush's job performance. These numbers are roughly consistent with the president's approval ratings over most of the last two years.

They also reinforce the need for the presumptive Republican nominee to create an impression of distance and distinction between himself and Bush.

Democrats, on the other hand, are eager to tie McCain to the unpopular outgoing president and portray his possible election as the equivalent of a third Bush term.

The poll, conducted Thursday through Sunday by phone, surveyed 1,026 adult Americans and carries a sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

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