



The REAL nutrient deficiency behind America's osteoporosis epidemic

(Hint: It's not calcium!)

There's an epidemic of osteoporosis in older women in the U.S. Each year, it leads to 1.5 million dangerous—and even fatal—bone fractures.

But I have always been curious why osteoporosis is virtually unknown in East and Southeast Asian women.

That's why two recent Asian studies caught my eye.

Problems with low bone-mineral density have been surfacing in South Korean women as they become more westernized in their diet and lifestyle. So Korean researchers decided to investigate what's really going on.

It turns out, by adopting a more Westernized diet—heavy in processed, packaged products and lacking in fresh, whole foods—these women are becoming increasingly deficient in a nutrient that is essential for strong bones. But it's not the nutrient you might expect.

These researchers discovered a significant increase in instances of vitamin C deficiency among women with low bone-mineral density.

What they found would not have been surprising to past generations of British sailors and doctors. In fact, British navy surgeon James Lind essentially discovered way back in the 1700s that weak bones are a result of scurvy.

And he also learned that scurvy could be prevented and treated by giving sailors limes and citrus fruits, which

are high in vitamin C (thus earning the nickname “limeys” for British sailors, who suddenly had a big advantage over their enemies).

But by the 20th century, Dr. Lind's bone-health discovery was all but forgotten—at least in the U.S. Now, the mainstream approach to preventing osteoporosis is to push calcium supplements (which are dangerous—more about that later) and bisphosphonate drugs (which are even more dangerous). In fact, as I reported in the January 2015 issue of *Insiders' Cures*, research shows that popular bisphosphonate osteoporosis drugs like Fosamax, Boniva, and Actonel can actually cause bones to break spontaneously.

No one's discounting that calcium is important for strong bones (along with vitamin D and magnesium). But the Asian researchers discovered that vitamin C is equally as important as calcium for bone health...and may be even more key when it comes to osteoporosis.

I'll delve into the details of these studies in a moment, but first, let's examine what I like to call the “Calcium Conundrum” for osteoporosis.

How can Asian women avoid dairy, meat...and osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is related to aging and sex hormones, including estrogen, which has a very strong effect on bones. In postmenopausal women,

estrogen levels drop precipitously, which can lead to osteoporosis. But nutritional, lifestyle, environmental, and genetic factors are also involved.

And yet, as I mentioned earlier, U.S. mainstream medicine puts heavy emphasis on only one of those nutritional factors: calcium.

Of course, everyone needs dietary calcium, which is abundant in dairy foods, meat, and seafood.

But what makes the women of Asia particularly interesting is that they rarely eat dairy foods, perhaps because of the high rate of lactose (milk sugar) intolerance in the population. Nor do they eat much meat. Instead, their main sources

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Marc S. Micozzi, M.D., Ph.D., is a worldwide leader in nutritional and complementary/alternative medicine. He has had a distinguished career as a researcher and physician executive at the National Institutes of Health and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Washington, DC, and the College of Physicians in Philadelphia PA. He has published over 30 medical and trade books, and founded and edited the first scientific journal, and the first textbook, on complementary/alternative and nutritional medicine, now going into a 6th edition (2018) and continuously in print since 1995.

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Author: Marc S. Micozzi, M.D., Ph.D.
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of protein are soy, pork, poultry, and seafood—which do not lend themselves to milk or dairy food production.

(Researchers have found that traditional dairy cows, sheep, and goats originated in the Middle East about 10,000 years ago.¹ And, of course, these animals were widespread in the area 2,000 years ago—which is why they're depicted in traditional Nativity scenes in communities that have not yet been overcome by political correctness. These livestock eventually made their way into China, Manchuria, and India, where cattle are treated, literally, as “sacred cows.” Lamb was introduced into Mandarin cuisine, but dairy never took hold anywhere in China.)

So if more dietary calcium, calcium supplements, and drugs are supposedly the answers to osteoporosis, how does that account for the relative rarity of osteoporosis in the more than 2 billion people in East and Southeast Asia?

That's where the studies come in.

High doses of C can cut your osteoporosis risk by more than half

The Korean researchers looked at vitamin C intake, physical activity, and bone-mineral density in 3,047 Koreans age 50 and older.²

The participants were divided into four groups ranked by their level of vitamin C intake. Compared to the lowest vitamin C group, those with somewhat higher C intake had a one-third lower risk of osteoporosis after adjusting for age and gender. Those with moderately higher C levels had their risk cut nearly in half, and the group with the highest C levels saw their risk decrease by more than half.

Interestingly, the researchers found that in people with high physical activity levels, there was no

association between vitamin C intake and osteoporosis risk.

Of course, weight-bearing exercise is important to maintain healthy bones. So if you don't get much physical activity, it's even more important to get adequate amounts of vitamin C to help prevent osteoporosis.

The Korean findings were reinforced by an earlier Chinese study. The researchers found that postmenopausal mice that were given vitamin C supplements had less bone loss than mice not given the vitamin.³

Think of osteoporosis as scurvy of the bones...and stock up on vitamin C

Of course, these studies would not be so captivating if we hadn't forgotten the vitamin C-bone connection unearthed many years ago by Dr. James Lind. Which raises the question: Why did 18th century British sailors get better care for their bones than 21st century American women are getting today?

Because mainstream medicine currently refuses to recognize that osteoporosis is scurvy of the bones—and *not* calcium deficiency. And that means that unfortunately for American women, the mainstream osteoporosis medical treatments remain “lost at sea.”

Don't be left to drown by your doctor. Help strengthen your bones and prevent osteoporosis with the following checklist:

- ✓ Eat a healthy, balanced diet that includes calcium-rich dairy, meat, and seafood, along with plenty of fruit, cruciferous vegetables, and leafy greens—which are all rich in vitamin C.
- ✓ Take 250 mg of vitamin C twice daily with meals.
- ✓ Take 10,000 IU of vitamin D daily, especially during this time of year,

when it's difficult for most people to get enough sun to make adequate amounts of D in their bodies.

- ✓ Take 200-400 mg a day of magnesium, which is also important for strong bones. Look for formulations that contain bone-healthy boron as well.

And finally, *avoid calcium supplements.*

I can't say this often enough. Calcium supplements can create high levels of calcium in your blood, which can settle in the blood vessels, the heart valves, and even the heart muscle. And that can lead to heart disease.

If you get enough vitamins C and D, your body will send the calcium you ingest from food to your bones. And that will improve your bone health and lower your risk of osteoporosis—without dangerous drugs or calcium supplements. **TC**

The do-it-all vitamin takes on asthma—and reduces emergency attacks by 60%

Asthma has always been one of the most difficult and dangerous conditions to treat with drugs.

But a new review of nine clinical trials shows that vitamin D, a.k.a. the do-it-all vitamin, can not only treat asthma safely, but also effectively.

In fact, the researchers found that small daily doses of D reduced the risk of serious asthma episodes by more than *one-third*.

And more importantly, almost *two-thirds* of the adults and children in the study who took daily vitamin D supplements didn't need emergency medical care for their asthma.

I'll tell you more about this breathtaking (or more accurately, breath-giving) research in a moment. But first, let's examine the history of asthma remedies—including the failed drug experiments I saw firsthand.

80 years of struggling to breathe better

During the 1930s, pharmacologist Carl Schmidt at the University of Pennsylvania (my alma mater) worked with Chinese collaborators to study the ancient Chinese remedy *ma huang*, from the ephedra tree. This research yielded the drug ephedrine for the treatment of asthma.

But in 2004, the FDA banned

ephedrine due to its abuse as a weight-loss supplement and exercise performance enhancer.

Some people turned to theophylline, a natural asthma remedy found in *Thea sinensis*—better known as tea. Theophylline, like caffeine and theobromine from cacao, is a stimulant that can widely open respiratory passages, which helps people with asthma breathe better.

Meanwhile, drugs for asthma have not fared very well. Some were put into inhalers, which caused many tragic deaths in children, adolescents, and young adults. The combination of the drugs and the toxic propellant gases in the inhalers caused fatal heart arrhythmias.

Dr. Domingo Aviado, my pharmacology professor at Penn, and I studied this problem during the 1980s, and these toxic propellants became restricted.

But the problems with asthma drugs persisted. And by the mid-1990s, the FDA became interested in non-drug approaches to treat asthma and other lung diseases.

I provided scientists at the FDA with research on the safe and effective treatment of asthma through acupuncture, which factored into the regulatory approval of the

acupuncture needle as a therapeutic medical device in 1996.

Acupuncture is now typically accepted as an effective pain reliever. (See my new book, *Overcoming Pain*, with Sebhia Dibra, as well as my Arthritis Relief and Reversal online learning protocol for more natural pain relievers. You can order a copy of the book by [clicking here](#), and you can enroll in my online learning protocol by [clicking here](#) or calling 866-747-9421 and asking for order code EOVS2S10C.) But it was actually the asthma data that helped push the FDA to approve acupuncture as a treatment for pain and other medical conditions.

Why D may be better than asthma drugs

This provides further evidence for what I've always said—that unlike drugs, which are targeted only to alleviate symptoms, natural remedies can treat health conditions at their source.

And not only that, but they can frequently address a variety of health conditions. For instance, we think of acupuncture as being useful for pain (and indeed it is) but it has equally important benefits for asthma.

We also think of vitamin D as important for bone health (and indeed it is—see the article on page 1) but it

may be equally important for asthma.

Which leads me back to the study I mention earlier. It analyzed nine clinical trials that involved a total of 435 children and 658 adults with mild to moderate asthma.¹

The researchers found that study participants who took oral vitamin D supplements—ranging from just 400 IU up to 4,000 IU per day—had a 37% lower risk of asthma episodes that required the use of medication. And similar doses of D decreased participants' need for emergency medical care by 60%.

It's important to note that these dosages are much less than the 10,000 IU of vitamin D I recommend everyone take every day (especially in the winter months, when most people aren't able to photosynthesize vitamin D from the sun). So imagine

what effects 10,000 IU a day could have on asthma sufferers!

Of course, children who are smaller than adults should take lower doses of vitamin D. Consult with a health practitioner who is knowledgeable about nutrition for the appropriate dose for your children or grandchildren.

The reasons for these vitamin D benefits for asthma sufferers remain unclear, but the researchers suggest the vitamin may trigger antiviral and anti-inflammatory responses that decrease lung sensitivity.

All hail the queen of nutrients


Of course, there have been thousands of studies showing the benefits of vitamin D for heart, kidney, brain, bone, and nervous system health. The sunshine vitamin can also help prevent chronic diseases like cancer, dementia,

and multiple sclerosis, as well as improve mood and treat depression.

But doctors still debate the need for vitamin D supplementation (even while acknowledging widespread D deficiency throughout the population).

So don't hold your breath waiting for vitamin D to become a mainstream treatment for asthma anytime soon.

"We don't yet have the evidence to say that everyone should take it," said lead study author Dr. Adrian Martineau, a professor at Queen Mary University of London, in the *New York Times*.

To me, those still dragging their feet, or anchors, about vitamin D are on a "ship of fools." Vitamin D could be crowned the "queen of nutrients." And, Dr. Martineau, the Queen Mary is sailing without you. 

The simple way to stop your sneezing, coughing, and sniffing

One common supplement can slash cold duration by up to 41%

My father-in-law, Jack O'Leary (1930–2004), was a publisher who worked on legendary Madison Avenue in New York during the 1960s. He longed for the day when medical research finally found the proverbial "cure for the common cold." He used to say, "Now that would be a story!"

When I worked at the National Institutes of Health, Jack would ask whether they were researching a cold cure—which would have been of such practical benefit for millions of people...and their employers.

After all, the federal government is (sad to say) by far the largest employer in the U.S., so you would think the U.S. would want its huge

government medical research institute to spend a little of its billions on practical research like that. (Then again, how would government employees ever use all those weeks and weeks of paid sick leave?)

But I could never report that any such research was underway at the NIH. They would have been looking in all the wrong places anyway.

That's probably why the new research I'm going to share with you today comes from Helsinki. The Finns haven't found a cure for the common cold...but they have found an effective treatment.

And, of course, it's a natural remedy I've known about for years—but that

the U.S. government continues to ignore.

Build your immunity with zinc

The Finnish study involved 199 men and women suffering from a common cold. They were placed into three random groups to test the effect of zinc acetate lozenges at a dose of 75 mg a day or higher.¹

Two analyses of the groups were performed. One analysis showed that zinc reduced the duration of the subjects' colds by 2.7 days, and the other showed a 2.9-day reduction. This is quite impressive when you consider that the study participants who didn't get zinc had an average cold duration of seven days.

So, doing the math, the people who took zinc had a 38 to 41% reduction in the amount of time they suffered from a cold.

Why? Because zinc is one of the most effective ways you can build your immunity. In a moment, I'll tell you about other ways you to boost your immune system and fight off colds and flu, but first let's take a closer look at how much zinc you really need.

How to make sure you get a safe—but effective—dose

It's no surprise that zinc is so effective at fighting colds. After all, this mineral has the highest number of health claims approved by the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority).

(Warning: The two supplements with the second- and third-most EFSA-approved health claims are iron and calcium. But I recommend you NEVER take these minerals in supplement form. Get them from food instead. See page 1 for more.)

The EFSA did get it right with zinc, though, approving it for 18 different health conditions. This includes skin and bone health, along with immune health.

The Finnish researchers asserted that a dose of 80 mg a day of zinc for one to two weeks would not have any adverse effects. Other studies have found zinc doses of 100 to 150 mg a day are safe as well.

Of course, the current RDA for zinc is woefully low—11 mg for men and 8 mg for women. I recommend you substantially increase that dose if you feel like you're coming down with a cold—up to 100 mg of zinc acetate lozenges a day.

Zinc acetate has been found to be a better formulation than zinc gluconate. The acetate form is more readily available and thus more easily absorbed in your body.

What not to do during cold and flu season

On the popular television show of the 1960s, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, there was one memorable episode when Granny (Nancy Ryan) cooked up a folk remedy for the common cold. At the end of the show it was revealed that her home remedy never failed to cure a cold—after seven days, the cold would be gone every time!

Of course, this just illustrates the importance of having a healthy immune system—so you can overcome a cold no matter what remedy you use.

My father-in-law certainly knew that. When I worked at Walter Reed Medical Center, Jack suggested we put up an exhibit in our popular visitor center and museum about how to avoid the common cold.

My daughter, Alicia, had just begun kindergarten, which is where children come into contact with lots of germs. They become little incubators, passing those germs on to the rest of us. I arranged for my daughter's kindergarten class to make a field trip to our Walter Reed museum, and they helped us design what would go into an exhibit on the common cold.

Even though the museum was located across from the Walter Reed Institute of Infectious Disease Research—meaning we had the best experts in the world right at hand—my daughter's kindergarten class was able to figure out what the government hasn't.

The children identified hygiene and a healthy immune system as the keys for fighting cold and flu. But our government instead puts its efforts into promoting ineffective and dangerous flu vaccines.

Years later, in middle school, my daughter presented a science-fair project showing how washing your

hands with soap and water prevents transmission of germs. And that “antibacterial” soaps are dangerous because they help spawn resistant germs. It took our government until this year to recognize the same thing and finally ban these unsafe soaps.

Other ways to boost your immunity

So, along with taking up to 100 mg of zinc acetate lozenges a day, how else can you boost your immune system during cold and flu season?

Well, first of all, following a **healthy, balanced diet** is the foundation for a healthy immune system.

I also recommend taking a high-quality **B vitamin** complex every day, 250 mg of **vitamin C** twice per day, and 10,000 IU of **vitamin D** each day.

Echinacea, goldenseal, and elderberry are key herbs to take when you're coming down with a cold or flu. Rather than trying to

Your “cold- and flu-proof” immune-boosting checklist

The following supplements can help boost your immune system to fight off colds, flu, and other viruses this winter—and all year long.

B-vitamin complex – choose a formula containing at least 5 to 10 mg of B6, 20 to 40 mcg of B12, and 800 to 1,600 mcg of folate

Magnesium – 400 mg per day

Selenium – 100 mcg per day

Vitamin C – 250 mg, twice per day

Vitamin D – 10,000 IU per day


And if you do begin to feel that familiar tickle in your throat, or sense other cold symptoms coming on, you can add zinc acetate lozenges—up to 100 mg per day. You may also consider brewing a nice herbal infusion containing echinacea, goldenseal, and elderberry (along with some added lemon and honey).

swallow capsules, I prefer these herbal remedies brewed in infusions—with the addition of cold-fighting honey, fresh lemon, and/or ginger.

You don't want to be taking these herbs on a steady basis—just when you're suffering from a cold or flu.

Research shows that like zinc, they will shorten the duration of the virus.

Finally, don't forget **magnesium** (400 mg daily) and **selenium** (100 mcg a day)—two minerals that, like zinc, have been shown to lessen the duration of cold and flu.

Bottom line: By boosting your immune system simply and naturally, you can get over your cold in record time. 

In Fond Memory of John H. (Jack) O'Leary

Boost your mood with the spirits of the season

When you hear have “a cup of cheer” this holiday season, it may be more than just a figure of speech.

A new study shows that when clinically depressed people have a few drinks, it actually makes them feel better.¹

This flies in the face of the “conventional wisdom” that alcohol acts as a depressant. And it also debunks the idea that the euphoria, excitement, exhilaration, or energy we experience after a couple drinks aren't real feelings. So-called experts have always claimed these feelings occur because the alcohol deadens our body's signals that tell us we're tired.

But this new study found that alcohol actually produces the same neurological effects as quick-acting antidepressant drugs (the ones that actually do work).

Meaning that alcohol doesn't simply dull or deaden the thoughts and feelings that lead to depression, as many people have assumed. Instead, it has a physiological antidepressant effect.

And the news gets even better. The researchers found that not only does a moderate amount of alcohol act quickly to combat depression, but it can also improve a person's mood for at least 24 hours.

Raise your spirits with spirits

The researchers discovered that

alcohol follows the same biochemical pathways in laboratory animals as so-called rapidly acting antidepressants like Ketamine.

(A single dose of Ketamine has been shown to relieve depressive symptoms within hours, and last for up to two weeks, even in the many people who don't respond to typical antidepressant drugs.)

The researchers also found that alcohol produced euphoric feelings in lab animals.

This is not news to forensic pathologists and toxicologists (my own subspecialty of medicine). Thousands of studies over many years have shown the following effects of alcohol intoxication.

After two to three drinks over one to two hours (0.03 to 0.12% blood alcohol), a “euphoria” stage ensues in most people. (Although smaller women might want to limit their drinks to one or two over the same time period).

This euphoric stage is characterized by sociability, talkativeness, self-confidence, and lowered inhibitions—but with some loss of attention and control.

Ultimately, what's not to like about this moderate amount of alcohol for after-work hours or holiday revelry?

It sounds like a generally desirable antidepressant effect. (As long as

you're not getting behind the wheel, of course. In many states, it's a crime to drive with a blood alcohol content of 0.08 or higher. Whether or not that level truly impairs your driving ability is debatable. But either way, it's better to not spend the holidays behind bars.)

However, I typically advise you stop things right there, because....

After four to five drinks over one to two hours (0.09 to 0.25% blood alcohol) in most people, an “excitement” stage takes over—characterized by emotionality, loss of inhibitions, and loss of judgment.

There is also decreased sensory response. So, as Shakespeare famously wrote, “It provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance.” Why go there? Especially because...

After six or more drinks over a short time period, many people experience confusion, stupor, coma, or even death.

Obviously, this is far more drinking than you ever want to do.

The confusion stage includes disturbances of sensory perception, such as double vision and the proverbial “blind drunk,” because the eight extra-ocular muscles that allow the eyes to focus for visual convergence won't work anymore. And in the stupor phase, there is

inability to stand or walk—the proverbial “falling down drunk”—because the skeletal muscles become uncoordinated.

Know when to say when

Hopefully you'll never need this information—but just in case, you now know what to avoid, and what to look for in someone who becomes dangerously inebriated during the holidays.

These are the “problem drinkers” who are typically involved in fatal motor vehicle accidents, in my experience. They are not the people who had one drink too many, but rather a dozen drinks too many.

But instead of focusing on these problem drinkers, it seems easier for the government to harass good citizens who are afraid to get behind

the wheel after having a glass of wine with dinner.

(We don't yet have this kind of scientific detail in people who are intoxicated on drugs such as marijuana. But make no mistake—they are just as intoxicated or more so, and with the skyrocketing motor vehicle fatalities to show for it in states where marijuana has been legalized.)

The nonalcoholic way to boost your spirits


Aside from the antidepressant effects of moderate, social drinking, there are the mood-boosting benefits of simply being social itself.

Don't believe me? Try going to a holiday party and *not* having a drink. You will probably still feel a lot of what happens in the “euphoria” stage of alcohol consumption—simply

from the social interaction and festive holiday surroundings.

I think that's because there is something in the atmosphere at this time of year. It is not just the nip in the air and the chestnuts roasting, etc.—because I have felt it all over the world, in any kind of weather.

There is a collective consciousness and a kind of positive energy in the air when everyone eases up and enjoys the moment. And science is beginning to show how these kinds of positive personal and collective energies can be projected and influenced.

So this month, take the time to savor the season. And remember that the terms “raising spirits” and the “spirit of the season” can have more than one meaning. 

5 easy ways to get some R&R this holiday season

One of my favorite stories this time of year is *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. But every time I read this classic fable, it brings to mind the opening line from another well-known Dickens novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

The holiday season is the best of times for many because school is out and adults are on vacation. Some entire businesses and factories close down completely for the last week of the year. And those employed by the government take their scores of paid “use it or lose it” vacation days. Not to mention the “early dismissals” bestowed by the executive branch for those few government bureaucrats still at work. (And fewer still actually working. Sometimes I can hardly tell the difference between government workers and a bunch of schoolchildren.)

In most places that remain open, work schedules and requirements are relaxed, and there is holiday gift-giving, partying, long lunches, early departures, and other kinds of revelry.

But of course, it may be the worst of times for workers in retail businesses. Between “black Friday” (the day after Thanksgiving, when retailers first get into “the black” and out of the red for the year) to the day before Christmas, these overworked employees typically have to overcome 11 months of their company's operating losses.

But if you're among the fortunate people who have the end of the year off, you should take the opportunity for some rest and relaxation, according to a new study.

Two-thirds of the world is exhausted

The largest study ever done on rest

and relaxation revealed that a jaw-dropping 68% of people worldwide would like to get more rest. And 32% said they needed more rest than the average person, while only 10% said they needed less.¹

The study, dubbed the Rest Test, involved an online survey taken by more than 18,000 people in 134 countries. The survey measured participants' favorite ways to rest, along with their attitudes toward relaxation versus activity.

The results were announced this fall on the BBC Radio 4 “All In The Mind,” program called the Anatomy of Rest. (I can hear the British announcer intoning, “Now, here's something for the rest of us, so to speak...”)

What I found particularly interesting about the study is that the people who said they didn't need more rest

had well-being scores twice as high as those who felt rest-deprived. So much for the theory that only lazy, discontented people rest.

And the study participants who were younger and had a higher household income reported they got less rest compared to their poorer, older peers.

Study participants who provided personal care and/or did shift or night work also reported fewer hours of rest. (That could be the definition of the medical and healthcare professions right there.)

The top 5 ways to relax

It's important to note that rest doesn't always mean sleep. It's possible to also engage in restful activity. The researchers reported that the top five endeavors that study participants found to be restful were:

1. Reading (58%)
2. Spending time in nature (53%)
3. Being alone somewhere (52%)
4. Listening to music (41%)
5. Doing nothing, or "chilling" (40%)

Of course, these activities have health and well-being benefits of their own. I've written several times about the many health benefits associated with being in nature. I reported in a November *Daily Dispatch* that reading books can increase longevity by about 20%. And I've also written about how listening to music can help reduce stress (perhaps even including a month of Christmas carols).

Of course, we all know stress is a major killer hiding behind most chronic diseases. We also know that relaxation therapies are beneficial ways to counter stress. So the good

news about this study is it shows that many people have found simple ways to achieve rest and relaxation through easily accessible activities.

It is also interesting that their favorite activities for rest and relaxation are typically done alone.

So my advice for this hectic holiday season is to take some down time for yourself during these times when a lot of employers are down.

Read that book you got under the tree this year, before putting it up on the shelf. Listen to that new CD in your stocking. Stop to sniff the cider, mulled wine, brandy, cognac, and gingerbread that comes around.

What else is there to say but, "God rest ye, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay..." 

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NEWS BRIEF

The "stree-free" secret for keeping your heart healthy this holiday season

The holidays can be stressful for anyone, but women who take on high-pressure tasks like refereeing family squabbles or planning holiday events may feel so much stress that they put themselves at risk for serious heart problems.

Why? Because this type of stress can lead to a potentially fatal condition called cardiomyopathy—particularly in women over age 50.

Cardiomyopathy occurs when the heart muscle is damaged due to great amounts of stress over a short period of time. The left ventricle of the heart becomes weakened and isn't able to pump blood as well throughout the body, which can lead to heart failure in some cases.

Usually, doctors see cardiomyopathy in extreme athletes like marathon runners or long-distance skiers when they enter middle age. But a surplus of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline can also cause cardiomyopathy.

Unfortunately, that's not the only heart condition that can result from holiday stress. Another thing to watch for is stress-induced blood pressure spikes—especially if you

already have high blood pressure.

But you can lower your risk of holiday heart disease with these tips:

1. Get help with heavy physical tasks, like lifting, moving, or unpacking decorations, holiday trees, or gifts.
2. Monitor your blood pressure daily.
3. Make sure to take time out for yourself and enjoy the special aspects of the season. That can include healthy physical activity like taking a long walk with a loved one, ice skating, or even a friendly snowball fight. And don't forget to stop and have a warm cup of heart-healthy coffee, hot chocolate, or your favorite herbal tea.

After all, you want to spend the holidays at home with family and friends, not in the emergency room. (Hint: The doctors and nurses want to be home with family and friends too!)

But if you do experience sudden chest pains or shortness of breath during or after acute stress—either emotional or physical—call your doctor or 911 immediately.