DR. MICOZZI'S
INSIDERS' CURES
APRIL 2020 • VOLUME XI • ISSUE 4

The stealth culprit behind ALL of America's deadliest epidemics

How to rein in your risk of cancer, Alzheimer's, diabetes, and heart disease in one fell swoop

For many years, doctors suspected that chronic, low-grade inflammation was an underlying factor in many deadly diseases—like cancer, dementia, diabetes, and heart disease, to name a few.

And then, study after study began backing up those suspicions.

Today, there's little doubt that reducing chronic inflammation can significantly lower your risk of chronic diseases. But at the same time, you still need a healthy immune system to naturally combat infections and injuries.

So, it's important to know the difference between the "good," disease-fighting inflammation, and the "bad," disease-*promoting* inflammation. And how to help ensure you have the "right" type of inflammation in your immune system, body and brain for optimum health.

Because when you're familiar with your body's inflammatory responses, you *can* keep chronic inflammation in check with a few simple steps.

How "normal," balanced inflammation works

There are two main types of inflammation—acute and chronic. Acute inflammation is your immune system's immediate natural response to any invader, such as a viral or bacterial infection, or to an injury.

The acute inflammatory response begins with your body sending more blood into the area of infection or injury. This increased blood flow brings in more oxygen, nutrients, white blood cells, fluids, and electrolytes to bathe and heal the area. The extra blood and fluids also create the swelling and heat we associate with inflammation.

Then, white blood cells attack the invading microbes, releasing chemicals. These chemicals kill the microbes, but they also turn your infected or damaged tissues into a little battlefield, resulting in more swelling, pain, and heat.

In addition, you'll likely have general fatigue and malaise because your body is focused on fighting the infection or healing the injury.

(It's also worth noting that taking an antibiotic doesn't change this acute inflammatory process. Antibiotics slow bacterial reproduction, which allows the immune system cells to overtake the microbial cells. But they typically don't attack bacterial cells outright.)

In the case of infection, or physical injury, there are also special blood cells and other cellular factors, like histamine, that flood into the damaged tissue during an acute inflammatory response.

First, a highly sophisticated "cascade" occurs to support damaged, bleeding tissues, by forming blood clots.

Normally, the body needs to keep blood flowing and avoid clotting to help prevent blocking organs like the heart (leading to a heart attack), the brain (potentially causing a stroke), or the lungs (causing a pulmonary embolism).

Then, once the bleeding from the injury stops, specialized white blood cells come in to clear out damaged cells and begin forming scar tissue.

This acute inflammatory response is uncomfortable, even painful, but it's part of the natural healing process to restore your cells, tissues, and body

In this issue:

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 available in a 6th edition and continuously in print since 1995.

Dr. Micozzi's *Insiders' Cures* is published monthly by OmniVista Health Media, L.L.C., 100 W. Monument St., Baltimore, MD 21201 for $74 per year ($6.16 an issue).

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Insiders' Cures, 100 W. Monument St. Baltimore, MD 21201.

Author: Marc S. Micozzi, M.D., Ph.D.
Publisher: Katherine Wheeler
Executive Editor: Amanda Angelini

back to a normal state of health. And it's only intended to fight infection or injury over the *short* term.

However, when this inflammation continues, problems start to occur…

How "abnormal," chronic inflammation works

Your body's acute inflammatory response is supposed to stop when your immune system heals an injury or conquers infectious microbes. But certain factors can cause low-grade inflammation to continue for days, months, or even years.

These factors fool your immune system into being on constant alert, leading to the chronic inflammation that harms your cells and tissues and boosts your risks of chronic diseases.

Some infections, like hepatitis and Lyme disease, can put the body into a state of chronic inflammation. Stress, poor diet, obesity and metabolic syndrome, lack of moderate physical activity, poor sleep, environmental pollution, and allergies can contribute to causing the same effects.

Many of these factors add up over the years. So the older you are, the more exposure your immune system has had to them.

Of course, some of the factors behind chronic inflammation are out of your control. For instance, there's only so much you can do about environmental pollution and allergies. But other factors are definitely within your control—and managing them effectively can make a big difference in alleviating chronic inflammation.

And interestingly, they're all intertwined. So if you alleviate one chronic inflammation factor from your life, it helps reduce others.

Let's take a look at a few simple measures you can take, starting today, to reduce—or even eradicate—the top risk factors for chronic inflammation.

Four simple steps you can start today to combat chronic inflammation

1.) Lower your stress. Chronic stress causes increases in hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, which can directly trigger chronic inflammation.

While it may be impossible to reduce *all* of the stress in your life, you can find ways to cope with it and keep it in check. Here are two highly effective solutions:

Mind-body techniques. Meditation, acupuncture, hypnosis, yoga, and other mind-body practices can reduce stress. In fact, in one recent study of 48 men, three months of yoga significantly lowered their levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), which is a key marker of inflammation.[1]

Now, I understand that not every mind-body technique works well for everyone. That's why I recommend my book, *Your Emotional Type,* to discover which stress-reduction strategy is best for you. You can find a copy under the "books" tab on my website, www.DrMicozzi.com.

Supplements. Plenty of research shows that vitamins B and D are natural and effective stress reducers. I recommend a high-quality B complex that contains at least 55 mg of B6 and 10,000 IU of vitamin D every day.

2.) Get moderate exercise. A recent study of 47 people found that just 20 minutes of walking on a treadmill stimulated and balanced the participants' immune systems in healthy ways, and produced an anti-inflammatory cellular response.[2]

Other studies show that moderate exercise like walking, swimming, housework, or yard work can help suppress inflammation by lowering stress levels and helping manage a

healthy weight. Bottom line? You only need about 140 minutes of sensible exercise *per week* to substantially lower your risk of chronic inflammation—this breaks down to 20 minutes each day—which is consistent with all the others studies I report on optimal amounts of exercise.

3.) Sleep in. Research shows that your sleep and immune function share the same regulator—your circadian system, or internal body clock. So when your sleep is disrupted, it directly affects your immune system…and that can contribute to chronic inflammation.

One paper that reviewed nearly 100 studies on sleep and inflammation found that getting less than six hours of sleep a day raises markers of inflammation like CRP[3]. And I've written about other research showing that seven to eight hours of sleep per night seems to be the "sweet spot" for optimum health.

4.) Eat right. You already know how much your diet influences your health, and that includes inflammation. A healthy, balanced, Mediterranean-style diet can go a long way toward stopping chronic inflammation. But there are also some particular foods to pay attention to, in order to keep your risk of inflammation at a minimum.

Foods to avoid in your diet:

Sugar and processed foods. I've written many times about studies showing that sugar and processed foods are directly linked to inflammation. They can also lead to an increase in abdominal fat, which secretes more of the biochemicals that are associated with chronic inflammation.

White bread and other refined carbohydrates. These foods are low in fiber and basically starve the gastrointestinal (GI) microbiome, which disrupts the immune-gut-mind-body system. They also typically contain a long list of artificial ingredients that are pro-inflammatory and toxic to your health.

Fried foods. When vegetable oils (with the exception of olive oil) are heated to high temperatures in order to fry foods, they can create pro-inflammatory compounds. They're also high in *omega-6* fatty acids, which research links to inflammation, particularly when you don't get enough healthy omega-3s for balance.

Commercial salad dressings. While a big salad full of fresh vegetables is a key inflammation fighter, slathering it in bottled salad dressings ruins the benefits. The top three commercial salad dressing ingredients are typically water, sugar, and soybean oil—which turn your healthy salad into a toxic "treat." The good news is, it's simple and nutritious to make your own fresh dressings with olive oil, lemon, herbs, mustard, and/or vinegar instead.

Foods to include in your regular daily diet:

Organic fruits and vegetables. Fresh produce contains vitamins, minerals, carotenoids, polyphenols, catechins, and other anti-inflammatory plant compounds. Just be sure to choose organic fruits and veggies to avoid pesticides and other chemicals—which can create more health problems beyond inflammation.

Healthy fats. Monounsaturated fats in avocados, olive oil, and nuts can decrease chronic inflammation.

Fish and fish oil. Fatty fish and seafood are loaded with omega-3 fatty acids—which have been shown to substantially reduce chronic inflammation. In fact, some studies suggest that high-quality fish oil supplements are the single most potent approach to reducing chronic inflammation. I recommend 5 to 6 grams of fish oil a day.

Prebiotic foods. There are more immune cells in our GI tract than in any other part of our bodies. And, of course, a healthy immune system produces a healthy inflammatory response. That's why prebiotic foods, which support the "good" probiotic bacteria in the GI microbiome, are key anti-inflammatories. These foods include asparagus, onions, apples, sauerkraut, and full-fat yogurt without added sugars.

Whole grains. In moderation, these are a much better choice than refined grains. Plus, whole wheat, oats, and

The anatomy of chronic inflammation

Chronic inflammation can increase your risk factors for the following diseases:

- Allergies
- Asthma
- Brain
- Cancer
- Celiac disease
- Chronic fatigue
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Cystic fibrosis
- Dementia (including Alzheimer's disease)
- Depression
- Gastritis
- Gum disease
- Heart disease
- Inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease and colitis
- Liver disease (nonalcoholic)
- Lupus
- Multiple sclerosis
- Osteoarthritis
- Parkinson's disease
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Type II diabetes

barley are prebiotic foods. And, digesting the fibers in whole grains yields a compound called butyrate, a beneficial fatty acid that helps fight inflammation.

Wine and beer. The hops in beer have anti-inflammatory properties. And the grapes in red wine contain many anti-inflammatory polyphenols. Plus, moderate daily consumption of wine and beer—one to two glasses—can help reduce the stress that contributes to chronic inflammation.

One more recommendation to stop chronic inflammation

Following these steps, and the rest of the recommendations in my *Inflammation Fighting Protocol,* can substantially reduce the chronic inflammation in your body and brain—and help keep many chronic diseases at bay. (To learn more about this comprehensive online learning tool, click here or call 1-866-747-9421 and ask for order code EOV3W400.)

To make sure your inflammation levels are *really* healthy, ask your doctor for a blood test.

Doctors run a lot of different tests on your blood, but they don't routinely assess markers of chronic inflammation. Your doctor should be measuring your CRP, homocysteine, and vitamin B and D levels, to help ensure your inflammation is in check—and your health is optimum.

Six surprising reasons to consider trading in your wine glass for a beer stein

As the weather starts to get warmer, it reminds me of a little ditty I heard many years ago from an older University of Pennsylvania alumnus at a college homecoming meeting: "Oh, it's that most difficult time of the year/Too warm for scotch, and too cool for beer."

But with summer on the horizon, peak season for cold beer is upon us. And there are actually many healthy reasons to crack open a cold one after a long, hot day.

Sip for sip, beer is actually healthier than red wine

Red wine has been touted by doctors and nutritionists since the 1980s (before the neo-prohibitionists started their campaign to ban alcohol). And deservedly so. I've written before about the many health benefits of red wine. But the barley and hops in beer contain some healthy nutrients and plant constituents, like flavonoids, that are even more potent than those found in the grapes used in wine production.

Plus, the health benefits of beer go beyond the simple relaxation and stress reduction of drinking any alcohol in moderation.

Indeed, research shows that moderate consumption of beer can lower your risk of chronic diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and dementia.

Beer can also help keep your gastrointestinal (GI) microbiome healthy, protect against bone loss, and lower your risk of getting cataracts.

Even non-alcoholic beer is good for you. One study found it reduces anxiety and promotes better sleep quality.[1] That's because the hops in beer are natural relaxants—even without alcohol.

In case you need more reasons why beer can be even healthier than wine, consider this: Like wine, beer is loaded with antioxidants. But beer contains more protein, fiber, and B vitamins than red wine.[2] And it's a gold mine for bioavailable minerals such as calcium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, zinc, and silicon.

But what about the calories in beer, and the infamous "beer belly"? Well, it turns out that beer and wine are both pretty low-calorie. A five-ounce glass of red wine has 125 calories, whereas a can of beer has 154. So *moderate* consumption of either beverage won't lead to a beer belly—or even a wine belly.

And when you take into account the many health benefits, those calories can be considered well spent. In fact, all of the nutrients in beer make it seem more like a food than an alcoholic drink.

So let's take a closer look...

The whole body health benefits of beer

Heart health. Beer can help protect against heart disease. In fact, research shows the alcohol in beer, spirits, and wine helps keep blockages from building up in arteries.

But some of the other constituents of beer appear to have cardiovascular benefits beyond the influence of alcohol. In particular, the B vitamins in beer keep two key risk factors for heart disease in check—homocysteine and chronic inflammation.

One recent study followed nearly 70,000 Chinese men and women (average age of 50) for six years. Researchers found that the moderate beer drinkers had lower risk factors for cardiovascular disease compared

with non-drinkers.[3]

And another study of more than 50,000 U.S. male health professionals found that for those who had suffered one heart attack, moderate beer consumption cut their risk of dying from heart disease by a whopping 42 percent.[4]

Brain health. Far from the myth of "killing brain cells," beer actually helps protect against cognitive decline and dementia.

Research has found that the silicon in beer helps protect the brain from compounds thought to contribute to cognitive disorders.[5]

And I've written before about research showing that a yellow compound in hops known as xanthohumol (XN) protects brain cells from damage—and may slow or even prevent the development of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.[6]

Plus, I recently came across a striking study that found that participants who drank enough beer to become "tipsy" were able to solve puzzles faster than those who were stone-cold sober. In fact, alcohol consumption made the drinkers 30 percent more likely to find unexpected solutions to the puzzles.[7]

All of these benefits may share a common connection—the anti-inflammatory properties of the hops that create the distinct taste of beer. Researchers compared different varieties of hops and found they contain constituents that block inflammation-causing compounds.[8]

Metabolic health. Moderate consumption of beer may be a refreshing way to ward off diabetes.

A five-year Danish study of more than 70,000 people found that men who consumed one to six beers per week had a 21 percent lower risk of diabetes compared with those who didn't drink any beer.[9]

Beer helps fight diabetes in several ways. First, Oregon State University research in lab animals shows that the compound in hops I mentioned earlier—XN—can improve glucose tolerance and insulin resistance, and fight the metabolic syndrome that can lead to diabetes.[10]

XN also increases sensitivity to leptin, a hormone that signals when you're full after eating, and helps regulate energy expenditure—two factors that help prevent obesity. And we all know how obesity is a big risk factor for diabetes.

Lastly, of course, hops' ability to block inflammation is key to fighting diabetes and other chronic diseases—as I discussed on page 1.

Gut health. The Oregon State study I just mentioned also found that XN influences probiotic composition in the body. Scientists think one reason is because the hops in beer act as prebiotics that support healthy probiotic bacteria in the all-important GI microbiome.

Plus, hops have long been shown to have antimicrobial properties, which helps explain why they were added to beer in the first place. (For example, English-India pale ale, or IPA, beers are notoriously high in bitter hops—which once upon a time preserved the beer in shipboard barrels during long ocean voyages from England to India and other tropical regions).

Scientists think the XN in hops may alter the balance of bacteria in the GI tract, promoting the abundance of "good" bacteria, or probiotics.

Some studies also show that the hops in ales and beers can help relieve digestive disorders by stimulating gastric and pancreatic enzymes.

Bone health. Not only can the silicon in beer help with brain health, but it's also key for strong bones—along with beer's calcium.

One research review cited studies showing that silicon plays an essential role in bone formation and maintenance. And increased intake of silicon leads to more bone mineral density and bone strength.[11]

The studies reported that 40 mg a day of silicon seemed to be the most effective dosage—and 12 ounces of beer provides more than 8 mg of this important mineral. (Other good sources of silicon are raisins and green beans.)

Taking all of this into account, it's also no surprise that another study found that moderate consumption of beer increased bone density in men and postmenopausal women.[12]

Eye health. Eye health is also influenced by beer. Scientists aren't exactly sure why, but research generally shows that natural substances that benefit the brain also benefit the eye—since both are derived from the same embryological tissue, and constituents that can reach the brain also reach the eye.

In one study, Canadian researchers found that drinking one beer per day (especially dark beers, which contain even more nutrients) decreased risk of cataracts by as much as 50 percent.[13] The researchers think beer's antioxidants protect the eye's mitochondria, while damaged mitochondria can lead to cataracts.

So, the next time you're about to reach for a glass of wine or a tumbler of scotch, consider opting for a nice, cold beer instead. It's a refreshing—and tasty—way to drink to good health. But remember...as always, moderation is key. For the most part, I recommend one to two cans or bottles of beer. IC

April showers bring pain-relieving plant oils

As the famous April showers begin, I'm reminded of the distinct odor in the air before and after it rains. But rainwater is actually colorless and odorless. So what causes this smell?

The aroma occurs when rain "activates" nutrients in the plants and soil. In particular, rainwater releases oils that plants produce during dry, dormant periods. These oils are essential for inhibiting a plant's growth and reducing its need to compete for limited moisture in the soil. But, when it rains, the plant no longer needs to inhibit its growth, so these intoxicating scents are released.

But these oils aren't just powerful compounds for the plant—they also can also have effects on other living organisms, from insects, to animals, to humans. In fact, these aromatic oils are the basis of one of the biggest recent natural health trends: essential oil aromatherapy. But unlike some health trends, the use of essential oil aromatherapy has quite a bit of solid science to support it. Of course, there are a few guidelines you should follow in order to find a quality product. And I'll tell you more about that in just a moment.

But first, let's take a closer look at how aromatherapy works. And, of course, it all starts with our sense of smell.

You see, our olfactory nerves (which are a big contributor to our sense of smell) are connected directly into the brain. That means our brains are connected to smells like no other kind of sensory input. Which is likely why smells can conjure up such strong emotions and memories.

But a plant's essential oils can do even more for our health. Studies show that many essential oils are naturally antibacterial, antimicrobial, and antifungal. Plus, there's quite a bit of research showing that essential oil therapy can help lower stress, alleviate pain, reduce inflammation, and improve sleep.

A roadmap for how essential oils work in the body and brain

Pain, inflammation, and stress. Science shows that aromatherapy can alleviate pain symptoms and associated emotional distress by targeting hormonal and neural pathways that involve the "feel-good" neurochemicals—endorphins, dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin.

Essential oils also influence the release of neurochemicals associated with inflammation and stress—specifically adrenalin and cortisol.

A variety of essential oils have these characteristics, including: chamomile, clove, eucalyptus, frankincense, geranium, ginger, grapefruit, jasmine, juniper, lavender, lemongrass, marjoram, pine, rose, rosemary, sage, spruce, thyme, vanilla, wintergreen, and ylang ylang.

Sleep and relaxation. Aromatherapy can provide an ideal, pill-free sleep solution. Research shows that lavender and chamomile essential oils help you to relax and ease you into sleep. They also help reduce cortisol levels to promote inner calm and reduce the effects of daily stress.

Orange and peppermint essential oils (and their botanical constituents called terpenes) can also promote relaxation and sleep.

How to use essential plant oils

While rain releases some plant oils, most commercially available essential oils are typically obtained by distillation of plant material.

Plant oils can be extracted from bark (cinnamon), blossoms (orange or neroli), bulbs (garlic, onion), dried flower buds (cloves), flowers (lavender, rose), fruits (lemon, orange), grasses (lemongrass), gums and resins (frankincense or boswellia), leaves (eucalyptus, peppermint), roots (calamus, ginger), or wood (camphor, sandalwood).

The amount of raw plant material to obtain usable amounts of oil varies, which is why essential oils fluctuate quite a bit in price. For example, when I was researching my book *Fundamentals of Complementary & Integrative Medicine* (now in its 6th edition), I discovered that it requires a whopping 220 pounds of fresh rose petals to extract just *two ounces* of rose oil.

Essential oils may be inhaled directly or applied to the skin. When they're used topically, the oils are usually diluted in a carrier oil, like coconut oil. Otherwise, the oils are too potent and may cause skin irritation when used alone.

Essential oil mixtures can also be used as massage oils, mixed into topical ointments, applied in compresses, or rolled right onto the pulse points like perfume. When the oils are applied topically, some aroma is naturally inhaled, but the oil works mainly by being absorbed into the skin and then transported into the bloodstream.

In fact, research shows that lavender massage oil, for instance, penetrates the skin after 10 minutes and reaches maximum blood concentrations in just 20 minutes.

Finding the best essential oils

When shopping for essential oils, it's important to note that there's no standard definition for the purity or therapeutic benefits. But to help ensure you're getting a high-quality oil, do some research—on the oil

itself, and on the brand. Remember to be wary of big online retailers like Amazon (as I recently warned)! Instead, you'll want to look for brands that stand behind each and every one of their products, perhaps with a 100% satisfaction guarantee.

To help ensure purity, choose organic or wild-crafted oils, which usually don't contain pesticides. And check to see that the formula is 100 percent pure essential oil. Some manufacturers dilute pricey oils, like rose oil, with vegetable oils to create more volume.

Essential oils should also be sold in dark glass bottles. This helps prevent light from entering, which can cause the oil to spoil.

So always be sure to avoid plastic containers, which can degrade and contaminate the oil. Lastly, make sure the label contains a country of origin and an expiration date.

Busting the BMI myth

New study reveals the No. 1 predictor of a long, healthy life

As I was writing the article on the benefits of beer on page 4, I started thinking about the infamous French paradox. In the 1980s, researchers found that the French population had *half* the rate of heart disease, but *double* the government's favorite risk factors for heart disease, at that time (including drinking wine, eating dietary cholesterol and fats, and smoking).

So, because the facts didn't fit the mainstream researchers' flawed and failed theories, they decided it simply had to be chalked up as a "paradox."

It turns out, of course, that the real science showed there was no paradox at all—mainstream medical research was just all wrong, all along. And they allowed their myths about diet and so-called cardiovascular "risk factors" to get in the way of a true understanding of how nutrition and lifestyle influences chronic diseases.

Now, a new generation of researchers has stumbled into another health paradox—the so-called "obesity paradox." And it's just as dangerous and ill-advised as the French paradox…

The faulty thinking behind the obesity paradox

At the heart of the obesity paradox are two sets of conflicting observations.

First, numerous studies show that a higher body mass index (BMI) can lead to inflammation and metabolic syndrome, which is the culprit behind many chronic diseases and may influence longevity (as I discuss on page 1).

But other studies show that, in older people and in people with heart disease, kidney disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), being a little overweight can actually *extend* their lifespan.

To try and make sense of this, researchers have come up with the obesity paradox—stating that a high BMI can actually increase some people's longevity.

But one of the key flaws behind the obesity paradox is the mainstream's insistence on relying on BMI as an indicator of excess body fat—and the health conditions associated with obesity.

When I first started as a researcher at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), I saw many of multimillion-dollar studies that used BMI as the standard indicator of body fat, weight, and body composition.

But BMI is just a statistical manipulation (a ratio of weight to height)—which, of course, appeals to the statisticians who rule the roost at NIH when it comes to diet, nutrition, and disease research.

On the contrary, anthropologists, human biologists, and the *real* experts on nutrition research already knew the importance of using more accurate ways of measuring body fat and body composition, which allows for better studies with more precise results. But the medical statisticians stick with their lousy methods for estimating excess body weight, just like they stick to their lousy methods for estimating dietary intake (as I often report).

These sloppy methods and failed myths about diet have led to a generation of "nutritional science" that was, again, all wrong, all along.

Which leads me to a new study that beautifully details this concept…and shows what *really* matters when it comes to lifespan.

Your gait is a true predictor of longevity

The study involved nearly 2,230 people, ages 60 or older, who had been admitted to a hospital with heart disease.[1] Before they were discharged, their BMI and gait speed (how fast and well they were able to walk) were measured.

The patients were then split into two groups based upon their gait speed. One group walked faster than two

and a half feet per second, and the other group walked slower. Then, those groups were split into another two groups based on whether they had higher or lower BMIs.

The researchers ran more tests on all four groups, and found that the group with higher BMI and a faster gait speed had better survival than the group with higher BMI and a slower gait speed.

This study reinforces what I've been telling you for years—*that the single most important predictor of how long you'll live is the quality and speed of your gait*. NOT how much you weigh... especially as you get older.

So the next time your doctor tries to hassle you about a little extra body weight—especially if you're older—but you still have a normal gait and are able to walk efficiently and quickly, just go ahead and *walk away*.

And there are ways to help ensure your gait stays steady as you age. Start by maintaining good balance. Balance allows your brain to rapidly process and integrate information from your eyes, inner ear, and limbs to help keep you upright and on your feet. In addition, be sure to build and maintain muscle mass, as strong muscles support a healthy, brisk gait.

You can do this by adopting a healthy, balanced, whole-food diet (like a Mediterranean-type diet) that includes plenty of protein with every meal, engaging in regular, moderate exercise daily (I recommend 20 minutes daily, or a total of 140 minutes per week), and staying away from cholesterol-lowering drugs, as they actually damage your muscles (I'll reveal all the latest alarming findings about cholesterol and statins in next month's issue, so stay tuned). IC

Citations for all articles available online at www.DrMicozzi.com

NEWS BRIEF

The "hottest" way to add years to your life

Many of us grew up believing that hot and spicy foods, like chili peppers, can upset your gastrointestinal (GI) tract and even cause peptic ulcers. But in recent years, research shows that was yet another medical myth.

In fact, study after study illustrates that greater consumption of hot chili peppers is associated with *substantial* health benefits—including a longer lifespan.

And now, an eight-year study of nearly 23,000 Italian men and women found that those who ate chili peppers at least four times a week were 23 percent less likely to die prematurely than people who didn't eat any.

Plus, the chili pepper eaters had a whopping 40 percent lower risk of death from heart attacks.[1]

One dietitian who analyzed the study said this conclusion may simply show that higher consumption of peppers is associated with following a generally healthier diet.[2] And while that's pure speculation, it may be partly true.

But it doesn't appear to take into account all of the science regarding the health benefits of capsaicin, a compound found in chili peppers. In fact, research suggests that capsaicin is a potent phytomedicine.

Capsaicin is what turns up the heat in chili peppers. It's also a powerful antioxidant. So it makes sense that it can help prevent cardiovascular disease and other chronic, deadly health conditions.

The easy way to spice up your diet

Some people don't like the heat of chili peppers or worry they'll have difficulty digesting them.

But there are varying degrees of heat in chili peppers—all of which contain healthy capsaicin. So if you want a milder taste sensation, check out the scale on this page and choose a pepper low in Scoville units (a measure of heat, or spiciness).

And remember, you can't tell how spicy a pepper is by its appearance. The color is not primarily an indicator of the heat level, but rather a sign of maturity of the pepper. As peppers grow, more carotenoid pigments accumulate and create their rainbow hues. So, hot chili peppers can be red, green, yellow, or orange.

Another factor to consider is that some pepper skins contain natural waxes, which can be difficult for certain people to digest. Remove the skins and roast the pepper if this is an issue for you.

No matter which type of chili pepper you choose, you have many flavorful cooking options. Chili peppers are staples in a variety of Italian, Mexican, and Asian dishes. Or you can be like my Uncle Mike, who liked to go out into his garden, pick a fresh chili pepper, and shred it right onto his pasta. Mangia!

Your chili pepper heat index guide

Back in 1912, pharmacist Wilbur Scoville developed the Scoville Heat Unit (SHU) to measure a chili pepper's spiciness.

A SHU of 80,000 or more is considered very hot. Moderate pungency is between 3,000 and 25,000 SHU, and mild pungency is 700 to 3,000 SHU.

Here's how some popular chili peppers rank on the Scoville Scale.[3]

- **Carolina reaper:** 2.2 million SHU
- ***Bhut jolokia*, or "ghost pepper":** 1 million SHU
- **Habanero:** 350,000 SHU
- **Thai:** 100,000 SHU
- **Cayenne:** 50,000 SHU
- **Serrano:** 25,000 SHU
- **Chipotle:** 10,000 SHU
- **Jalapeño:** 10,000 SHU
- **Anaheim:** 2,500 SHU
- **Poblano:** 2,000 SHU
- **Banana pepper:** 500 SHU
- **Pepperoncini:** 500 SHU