



The Liker Health Report

Keeping People Focused on Staying Fit & Healthy

Winter 2017

The Liker Health Report is a quarterly publication intended to raise awareness of health-related issues and to encourage readers to take charge of their health and live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

The Heart of the Matter: POLITICS-INDUCED STRESS

The 2016 election season may be over, but many Americans continue to experience emotional stress caused by the political rhetoric, ill feelings, and uncertainty which continues. Combined with recent holiday stress, some people find themselves ill-equipped to handle their stress. When stress is prolonged or severe, you may feel overwhelmed or out of control of your own life. And even seemingly minor stress if not dealt with effectively can cause health risks, including headaches, fatigue, apathy, depression, upset stomach, diarrhea, constipation, and tightness in the chest. If these symptoms become more frequent or even permanent and interfere with one's daily activities, there is cause for concern. If you feel so stymied by politics-induced stress that you believe your health is in jeopardy, check with your physician.

Another increasingly significant factor in dealing with one's stress is social media. Don't let the "social" in social media fool you either. Experts warn that social media is slowly taking away our social skills by distancing us from person-to-person interactions and adversely affecting mental health. Dr. Daniel Pacheco, MD, the chief medical officer for Banner Behavioral Health Hospital in Scottsdale, Arizona suggests, "Try having a discussion with another person. Social media allows us to become detached from people. It may connect us in a weird way, but it separates us. We're social creatures, designed to pick up non-verbal cues – posture, expressions. There's something lost in the exchange of human ideas online." Social media can have a negative impact on relationships, family time, health, and work performance. How much time spent tweeting or texting would be better spent on going to the gym with a friend, or taking a long walk with your dog?

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Self-Care to Manage Stress

- ✓ **Avoid drugs & alcohol.** These might be a temporary fix, but create more problems in the long run.
- ✓ **Seek support.** Identify someone with a sympathetic nature who's a good listener and can be non-judgmental -- spouse, partner, family member, friend, member of the clergy, doctor or professional counselor.
- ✓ **Maintain social interactions.** Take care not to isolate yourself. Spend time with loved ones and engage in fun, non-political activities.
- ✓ **Stay active.** Engage in "feel good" activities that keep your thoughts positive, such as volunteering or focusing your attention on someone else's needs.
- ✓ **Take care of your physical and emotional needs.** Maintain a well-balanced, nutritious diet. Exercise regularly, at times, with other people. Get plenty of quality sleep. Follow as normal a routine as possible. If you're feeling stressed out, take a break and do something special for yourself.

Your Lifestyle: FIGHTING INFLAMMATION IN 2017

According to wellness predictions for the New Year, the number one trend you can expect to see and hear a lot about is inflammation-fighting foods. Inflammation has been linked to many serious health conditions, including chronic and autoimmune diseases, so it's no wonder that utilizing one's daily diet to decrease inflammation has become a priority. From arthritis, brain diseases, cancer, depression, diabetes, heart disease and intestinal woes, chronic inflammation is increasing pain and suffering as well as shortening lifespans.

Inflammation may be getting a bad rap, but it does serve a useful purpose in the human body. In fact, inflammation initiated by the immune system is a very effective way to deal with foreign invaders trying to compromise the body. Whether it is a pathogenic microbe (bacteria, virus, or fungi), plant pollen, or a toxic chemical (pesticide, herbicide, or environmental pollutant), intermittent inflammation acts to isolate the invaders and signals the T-cells and macrophages to come and destroy them.

The problem arises when the inflammatory processes do not subside after the infection is gone (i.e., the virus is destroyed) or if the pollen or chemical irritation is ongoing. Essentially, the immune system is hyped up and at some point, it can no longer distinguish between a pathogenic microbe and healthy cells. It attacks the healthy cells; these are the cells that comprise the body's tissues and organs. For example, the immune system may attack the insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas, and chronic attacks may eventually lead to the destruction of the beta cells. This type of autoimmunity leads to the development of type 1 diabetes. Similarly, if the immune system attacks joint tissue, arthritis may develop.

The goal, therefore, is to allow the immune system to create inflammation when needed, and to prevent too much inflammation. Inflammation-promoting foods are generally the foods that we know are bad for our health -- high-carb, low-fiber foods, sweets, red meat, processed meat, and all varieties of 'junk food'. Individuals whose diets are comprised of these types of foods have a propensity for obesity which is also a significant risk factor for inflammation.

Foods that Trigger Inflammation

- ✓ **Refined or processed carbohydrates** (sugar, white bread, white flour, cookies, cakes, pastries)
- ✓ **Fried foods**
- ✓ **Sodas**
- ✓ **Sugar-sweetened beverages**
- ✓ **Margarine, lard, and shortening**
- ✓ **Red meat** (particularly meats that come from grain-fed animals)
- ✓ **Processed meat** (sausage, hot dogs, lunch meats)

Diet and nutrition have always played a role in the management of certain diseases, and now we know that certain foods possess the ability to reduce the risk of inflammation. These anti-inflammatory foods are naturally high in antioxidants and polyphenols. The Mediterranean diet is considered 'anti-inflammatory eating' due to its high composition of fresh fruits and vegetables (high in fiber), nuts, healthy oils, fish, and whole grains (not refined or heavily processed). The added benefit of the Mediterranean diet is that individuals tend to remain at a healthy body weight and are less likely to become obese.

Foods that Quell Inflammation

- ✓ **Green leafy vegetables** (spinach, kale, collard and mustard greens)
- ✓ **Tomatoes**
- ✓ **Olive oil**
- ✓ **Fruits** (apples, blueberries, cherries, oranges, strawberries)
- ✓ **Tree nuts** (almonds, walnuts)
- ✓ **Fatty fish** (mackerel, salmon, sardines, tuna)
- ✓ **Coffee***

*There's even some good news for coffee drinkers. Coffee contains polyphenols and anti-inflammatory compounds, so it may provide some protection against chronic inflammation.

Medical Oddities: GEOGRAPHIC TONGUE

Geographic tongue is the layman's term for a condition called *benign migratory glossitis* or *erythema migans*. It's an inflammatory condition that causes map-like appearances on the upper surface and sides of the tongue. Even though geographic tongue is harmless and not a precursor to oral cancer, it can look quite odd.

Normally, the tongue is covered in tuft-like projections (lingual papillae), some of which contain the taste buds. These projections give the tongue a surface that is irregular in texture and whitish-pink in color. In geographic tongue, the papillae disappear, leaving behind a more smooth surface that is darker red in color. Multiple lesions that look like white patches or sores, typically appear on the tongue before the papillae disappear. The lesions can change shape, size and migrate around the surface of the tongue, hence the name "geographic tongue". If the lesion is biopsied, its appearance is similar to that of psoriasis.

Most people do not experience symptoms other than the unusual appearance. There may be a burning

sensation when eating spicy or acidic foods or from exposure to toothpaste or cigarette smoke, but this is relatively rare, affecting about 10% of patients with geographic tongue. If a patient experiences burning, his or her doctor will rule out oral candidiasis (a yeast infection of the mouth) first.

Although as many as 2-3% of the adult population has geographic tongue, the cause is unknown. The condition can run in families, so there may be a genetic link, or simply a commonality in the family members' diets. Women appear to be affected more than men. Both genders are typically afflicted during the years of and after middle age.

Medical research has demonstrated conflicting results, yet a few hypothetical causes include vitamin B2 deficiency, psychological stress, or hormonal factors.

If you suspect that you may have geographic tongue, it's important to see a dentist or physician for a visual inspection and diagnosis. Tests may be ordered to rule out other possible medical conditions with similar symptoms. Most patients with geographic tongue recover on their own without any treatment. If a patient has pain that doesn't subside or is severe, medication may be prescribed. Such treatments include:

- ✓ Over-the-counter pain relievers
- ✓ Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications
- ✓ Prescription corticosteroids (applied on the tongue)
- ✓ Mouthwash containing an anesthetic
- ✓ Zinc supplements

Additionally, symptoms may resolve more quickly by avoiding these irritants:

- ✓ Spicy, hot, or acidic foods
- ✓ Salty nuts
- ✓ Whitening or heavily flavored toothpaste
- ✓ Tobacco

Geographic tongue is often accompanied by another condition called *fissured tongue*. Fissured tongue is also a benign condition

that is characterized by one or more deep grooves (fissures) located in the top surface of the tongue. Conversely, a normal tongue is mostly flat across its length. Some medical professionals believe that fissured tongue is actually an end stage in the progression of geographic tongue.

Geographic tongue may go away over time, but it's impossible to predict an exact time line. And, in some people, it doesn't resolve, so the best self-care advice is to pay attention and avoid possible triggers that worsen the lesions or increase the discomfort.

Symptoms of Geographic Tongue Lesions

- ✓ Have a whitish colored border
- ✓ Vary in shape, size, and color
- ✓ Initially appear in one area and migrate to another
- ✓ Come and go, change, or migrate quickly, sometimes within a period of a few days
- ✓ May last for as long as a year



Did You Know?

Many people aren't aware they have geographic tongue until an oral exam with a dentist.

Charting the Symptoms: HIP PROBLEMS

Your hips are critical to your mobility, and any problems involving them can significantly affect overall health. Begin with Question #1 below and follow through to your specific symptom(s) to check for possible causes of your pain.

QUESTION #1
 Did you fall or feel as if your hip suddenly gave way?

NO →

Go to **QUESTION #3**.

YES ↓

QUESTION #2
 Do your toes on the injured side seem to turn outwards?
 Does it hurt if you stand, straighten, or lift the leg?

YES →

You may have a **hip fracture**.

NO →

You may have **bruised hips**.

ASAP →



QUESTION #3
 Do you have swelling, stiffness, redness or pain in any other joints besides your hip?

YES →

You may have **arthritis**.

→



Try an over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medication. See your doctor if symptoms persist.

NO ↓

QUESTION #4
 Do you sometimes feel a 'click' in your hip or have occasional pain during activity?

YES →

You may have a **congenital hip problem**.

→



NO ↓

QUESTION #5
 Is your pain in the back of the hip and does it begin in the lower back and radiate into the buttocks or down the leg?

YES →

You may have **sciatica** (a pinched nerve) or a ruptured disk if the pain shoots down the leg near the knee or into the foot.

→



Rest, apply heat and try an OTC anti-inflammatory. See your doctor if the pain persists or travels down the leg. If you suddenly develop difficulty controlling urination or bowel movements, call your doctor right away.

NO →

Check with your doctor if you think the problem may be serious.

MORE ABOUT SCIATICA

What is Sciatica?

The term 'sciatica' refers to the condition in which pain radiates along the sciatic nerve. The sciatic nerve is a grouping of nerve roots that extend from the spinal cord in the lower back and goes through the buttocks, down the back of leg and into the foot. Although there is one sciatic nerve on each side of the body, sciatica typically only affects one or the other side. The sciatic nerve is both the longest and widest nerve in the entire human body.

What Causes Sciatica?

Most people experience sciatica as a result of a herniated disk in the spine; a bone spur on the spine; or spinal stenosis in which a narrowing of the spine causes compression on the sciatic nerve. Although very rare, a tumor can cause nerve compression. These conditions cause inflammation, swelling, pain, muscle weakness, and occasionally numbness or tingling in the leg.

How Varied are the Symptoms of Sciatica?

Sciatic pain can be felt anywhere along the length of the nerve, and it can range from mildly achy to sharp, burning, or excruciating. Some people experience the sensation of an electric shock. These symptoms may feel worse with sneezing, coughing, or sitting for long periods of time. If the pain is accompanied by muscle weakness, numbness, or tingling, these symptoms can be in different parts of the leg simultaneously.

What are the Risk Factors for Sciatica?

- Advancing Age
- Obesity
- Prolonged Sitting or Sedentary Lifestyle
- Diabetes (increases the risk of nerve damage throughout the body)

How is Sciatica Diagnosed?

A physical exam includes checking your reflexes and muscle strength. Your doctor will ask you to perform various movements which may elicit additional pain as an indicator of sciatica. Imaging tests (x-ray, MRI, CT scan) may be ordered if the pain is severe and there is no improvement within a few weeks; these tests help detect herniated disks and bone spurs. Electromyography, which measures electrical impulses of the nerves can differentiate whether the nerve compression is the result of a herniated disk or spinal stenosis.

What is the Treatment for Sciatica?

Self-care treatments include applying cold or hot packs to the affected area; these can be used exclusively or alternate between the two depending on which provides the greatest relief. Slow and gentle stretching of the low back can help ease nerve compression. Over-the-counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen or naproxen sodium can be used short term and not to exceed the recommended dose. Alternative treatment modalities, such as acupuncture or chiropractic therapy, may be helpful for some patients. Severe sciatica may require medical intervention such as prescription anti-inflammatories, muscle relaxants, narcotic pain relievers, or corticosteroid injections. Surgery is a last resort for severe, chronic pain, substantial muscle weakness, or loss of bladder/bowel control.

How Quickly Does Sciatica Go Away?

When sciatica is mild, it typically goes away with self-care within a week. If there is no noticeable improvement or the pain becomes worse, it's time to see your doctor. You should seek immediate medical help if the suspected sciatic pain is the result of a violent impact injury such as a car, motorcycle, or bicycle accident or if it becomes difficult to control your bladder or bowels.

Personal Health: SEPSIS

Sepsis, once called *septicemia* and *blood poisoning*, is a complication of the inflammatory response to an infection, which may progress to a life-threatening situation. The inflammation becomes so overwhelming that it triggers a cascade of reactions that damages multiple organs and may ultimately cause organ failure. A patient with sepsis can progress to septic shock and if his or her blood pressure drops dramatically, the patient can die.

Sepsis is more common and quite dangerous in young children, older adults, or people with weakened immune systems, such as cancer patients, diabetics, burn patients, transplant patients, or people who have had major body trauma or open wounds. Often people who are already quite sick, are in the intensive care unit, or have undergone major surgery are likely to develop sepsis. Hospital-acquired infections are increasingly prevalent, and many patients are discharged with a potentially life-threatening infection waiting to overcome the body.

Sepsis is generally viewed as an acute three-stage condition which begins with sepsis, progresses to severe sepsis, and finally to septic shock. For a diagnosis of sepsis, patients must have a likely or confirmed infection, plus two or more of the classic sepsis symptoms (*see box at right*). For a diagnosis of severe sepsis, at least one additional symptom of possible organ failure must be present. And for a diagnosis of septic shock, all of the symptoms of severe sepsis must be present, plus dangerously low blood pressure.

Sepsis begins with some type of infection, most commonly caused by a bacteria; but it can also be the result of a viral, fungal, or parasitic infection. The initial infection is often located in the lungs (i.e., pneumonia), urinary tract (i.e., kidney infection), skin (i.e., MRSA), brain, abdominal organs, or bloodstream (i.e., bacteremia). As the immune system goes into 'over-drive' trying to combat the infection, the inflammation escalates and the sepsis worsens. Blood flow to the vital organs (heart, brain and kidneys) is compromised, and when the organs

do not receive sufficient blood and oxygen, they begin to fail and tissue dies. Additionally, blood flow may be impaired by blood clots in either the organs or in the arms, fingers, legs, and toes, leading to gangrene.



Diagnosing sepsis isn't always easy because its symptoms can mimic other conditions such as anaphylactic shock, adrenal insufficiency, low blood volume, heart failure, and pulmonary embolism.

Sepsis Diagnosis: an infection + at least 2 symptoms

- ✓ Body temperature above 101° F or below 96.8° F
- ✓ Heart rate greater than 90 beats/minute
- ✓ Respiratory rate greater than 20 breaths/minute

Severe Sepsis Diagnosis: + 1 additional symptom

- ✓ Difficulty breathing
- ✓ Inability of the heart to pump blood normally
- ✓ Decreased platelet count
- ✓ Significant decrease in amount of urine excreted
- ✓ Abrupt change in mental functioning; confusion
- ✓ Abdominal pain

Septic Shock Diagnosis: severe sepsis symptoms +

- ✓ Extremely low blood pressure that is unresponsive to intravenous fluid replacement

Blood tests and imaging scans can help provide confirmation so that appropriate treatment is administered, including the most effective antibiotics to treat the specific bacterial infection. Blood is drawn from two different locations and analyzed for type of infection, blood clotting abnormalities, insufficient liver and/or kidney function, reduced oxygen availability, and electrolyte imbalance. Imaging scans are often done to pinpoint the location of infection, particularly if the blood tests do not reveal the type of infection. Scans work well to identify infections in specific areas of the body -- lungs (x-ray); appendix, pancreas, and bowels (CT scan); abscesses in the spine and soft tissue infections (MRI); and gallbladder or ovaries (ultrasound).

Continued on Page 7.

SEPSIS *Continued from page 6.*

Once sepsis is diagnosed, prompt and aggressive treatment is crucial to a patient's survival. Patients with severe sepsis are admitted to a hospital's intensive care unit where they are closely monitored and receive oxygen, I.V. fluids, and medication. The condition can potentially progress rapidly to septic shock, and it is not uncommon for patients to be put on mechanical ventilation ('life support') to stabilize their breathing and the heart's pumping action. Dialysis may be necessary if the kidneys are failing. If a localized source of infection, such as an abscess, has been identified, surgery to remove it may be performed.

In most sepsis cases, a bacterial infection is the cause and so, broad-spectrum antibiotics are given intravenously. Broad-spectrum antibiotics work against a wide variety of bacteria strains and are given until the patient's blood tests come back from the lab. If a specific bacteria is identified, the doctor may switch to a narrow-spectrum antibiotic which is designed to fight the specific bacteria.

If a patient's blood pressure is very low even after being given I.V. fluids, a vasopressor drug can be administered. Vasopressors work by constricting the blood vessels, thereby helping to increase blood pressure. Other medications include:

- ✓ corticosteroids in low doses to down-regulate inflammation
- ✓ insulin to stabilize blood glucose levels
- ✓ immunotherapy drugs to tone down the immune response
- ✓ analgesics for pain management
- ✓ sedatives to help patients rest or sleep better

Sepsis Statistics & Facts

- ✓ Approximately 0.2 to 3 people per 1000 get sepsis every year.
- ✓ One million Americans get sepsis annually.
- ✓ Sepsis rates are increasing.
- ✓ Sepsis is more common in men than women.
- ✓ The mortality rate is as high as 30% for sepsis, 50% for severe sepsis, and 80% for septic shock.
- ✓ Sepsis has been described in the days of Hippocrates.

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA



The Medicine Cabinet

Stay Healthy When Those Around You Are Sick

Flu season may just be getting started, but viruses that cause the common cold are present 365 days of the year. Whether they come from the workplace, the gym, the grocery store, a local restaurant, or any other public place, germs are everywhere and they're on the prowl for a host. The goal of any virus is to survive, so they insert their genetic material into the host cells of another organism so the host cells will in turn, replicate the virus.

The host has its own defense against viruses -- its immune system. Although the immune system is continually defending against these invaders, usually with great success, sometimes a less than optimally functioning immune system cannot keep up. When the virus replicates itself at 'critical mass', an infection takes hold and symptoms appear. Follow these tips to minimize your risk of seasonal influenza as well as the common cold:

- ✓ Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water, particularly after being around someone who is sick.
- ✓ Wash your hands before eating or preparing food.
- ✓ Avoid touching your mouth, eyes, nose.
- ✓ Replace your toothbrush after you have been sick.
- ✓ Change your bed linens frequently.
- ✓ Clean the telephone receiver and cell phone daily (pathogens like to hide and it's easy to re-infect yourself).
- ✓ Change the air filters in your home as often as recommended by the manufacturer; consider using HEPA filters.
- ✓ Air out your home regularly, especially when someone is sick.
- ✓ Avoid dairy products which thicken phlegm and make it more difficult to cough it up.
- ✓ Drink plenty of clear, non-alcoholic fluids.
- ✓ Avoid ice and cold drinks as these impede the body's ability to fight pathogens.

What's the Message?

FOR YOUR **STRESS** AWARENESS:

It's important to learn how to identify and manage stressful situations so they don't take a toll on your health. Seek help if you are feeling overwhelmed.

Staying physically active and maintaining social networks with person-to-person interactions are ideal for keeping your stress in check.

FOR YOUR **INFLAMMATION** AWARENESS:

Chronic inflammation can lead to chronic disease and autoimmune conditions.

Choose a diet that contains low-inflammatory foods, such as the Mediterranean-style diet.

FOR YOUR **GEOGRAPHIC TONGUE** AWARENESS:

Geographic tongue is a harmless condition that typically goes away on its own.

Annual oral exams by a dentist are key to identifying any pre-cancerous growths or tumors.

FOR YOUR **HIP SYMPTOMS**:

Inflammation is a common cause of hip pain and often results from injury to the joint or injury to the spinal nerves.

Sciatica typically goes away with self-care. If you have difficulty controlling your bladder or bowels, check with your primary care physician as soon as possible.

FOR YOUR **SEPSIS** AWARENESS:

Sepsis can progress to life-threatening septic shock, so immediate, aggressive medical attention is critical.

As the rates of sepsis are increasing, it is important to minimize the risk of bacterial infection.

QUOTABLE QUOTATIONS

One-half of the troubles of this life can be traced to saying yes too quickly and not saying no soon enough.

Josh Billings

Dear Dr. Liker... I recently heard that a person's race can affect immune response. Can you explain?

Yes, a recent study compared the white blood cells of African Americans to European Americans and found that the cells of African Americans had a more pronounced immune response when they were exposed to pathogenic bacteria. The researchers infected the cells in a petri dish with salmonella and listeria. After twenty-four hours, the African Americans' white blood cells had killed the bacteria three times faster than the European Americans' white blood cells. The quantity of the immune response was correlated with how much genetic material came from either African or European ancestry.

On first glance, the stronger immune response in African Americans might have seemed like a benefit, but researchers believe that there is a tremendous downside. It may explain why African Americans have a higher risk of heart disease, stroke, and other autoimmune or inflammatory conditions. Excessive inflammation within the body can cause chronic hypertension and damage tissue and organs. Hopefully, this research will lead to more effective treatments for chronic diseases which affect African Americans disproportionately more than people of European descent.

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LIKER CONSULTING, INC.

The Center for Executive & Corporate Health

Harley R. Liker, M.D., M.B.A.

CEO

9675 Brighton Way, Suite 350
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

E-mail: hliker@likerconsulting.com
www.likerhealthreport.com

Publisher and Editor-in-Chief -- Harley Liker, M.D., M.B.A.
Senior Editor -- Karen Edwards, M.S.

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