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Diet, exercise controls type II diabetes

A new study in rodents by researchers at East Carolina University, Greenville has provided a biological explanation as to why diet and exercise are the best tools for treating type 2 diabetes.

A high fat diet can attenuate the body’s sensitivity to insulin, a hormone that regulates blood sugar levels, and can lead to type II diabetes.

While this process is known to be mediated by cellular components called mitochondria and by cellular oxidative stress, the mechanisms underlying their involvement are poorly understood.

Now, the new study, by Darrell Neufer and colleagues, sheds light on this issue.

In rodents, a high-fat diet induced mitochondrial release of hydrogen peroxide, a damaging oxidative chemical, and reduced cellular resistance to oxidative stress.

Treatment of the animals with a novel antioxidant protected them from insulin resistance.

Animals that were genetically manipulated to produce the compound catalase, which breaks down hydrogen peroxide, in their muscle mitochondria, were also protected.

Apart from providing a potential explanation for the most effective way to reduce an individual’s risk of developing type 2 diabetes, the researchers suggest that their data indicate that mitochondrial-targeted antioxidants might prove more effective at combating reduced insulin sensitivity than general antioxidants, which have thus far had little effect.
Editorial: Going red - Help fight heart disease among women

Friday, February 06, 2009

The East Carolina Heart Institute, which opened its doors last month, stands as a powerful weapon in the fight against cardiovascular disease and stroke. Through educational outreach and first-class treatment, the center intends to reduce the alarmingly high instance of heart disease in this region.

Though modest lifestyle changes can vastly improve heart health, raising awareness of the risk can be difficult. And any program that can do so — like today's National Wear Red Day — should be cheered for making meaningful strides in promoting better, healthier habits.

Valentine's Day is more than a week away, but red will be a popular color today as well. The National Heart Association has designated today as National Wear Red Day as a means of promoting awareness of cardiovascular disease and stroke, particularly among women.

According to that organization, more than 870,000 Americans die of heart disease and stroke each year. It is a particularly acute problem in eastern North Carolina, were poor diet, lack of exercise, a high rate of smoking and no reliable access to preventative health care all contribute to a high death rate.

Though cardiovascular disease is often incorrectly perceived to be a disease afflicting men, cardiovascular disease claims approximately 460,000 women each year. Many women do not know the risks they face or how simple changes in diet and exercise promise tremendous benefits.

Providing that information is the purpose of the Go Red for Women effort and the National Wear Red Day. Through education and outreach, more women can learn about the value of regular check-ups, the need for a daily walk or run and how a family's history of heart health can affect the risk of cardiovascular disease.

In eastern North Carolina, more women now have an additional resource with the opening of the Heart Institute. East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine and Pitt County Memorial Hospital believe the center will help with education as well as treatment, meaning fewer patients needing care for heart disease and fewer deaths from stroke.

The American Heart Association hopes to record a 25 percent reduction in coronary heart disease in 2010, which stands as an ambitious goal. It can be achieved through individual responsibility, by learning about heart health and committing to making lifestyle changes. And it begins with awareness — a willingness to "Go Red" — to make a difference in the lives of women.

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A story about a fang-toothed teenager raised in a cave

By Kelley Kirk-Swindell
The Daily Reflector

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Left as an infant to be raised by the bats, the child grew until he was discovered by some local teenagers caving on the mountain.

Of course, the story wasn't true, but it was turned into "Bat Boy: The Musical." East Carolina University will stage the musical beginning Thursday in McGinnis Theatre.

Given the campy nature of the story, "Bat Boy" is a fun show.

"It has been described as a cross between 'Rocky Horror Picture Show' and 'My Fair Lady' with a real strange angle to it," said Jeff Woodruff, managing director of the School of Theatre and Dance.

Bat Boy is brought back to town by the three teenagers who discover him and take him to the vet to nurse him back to health. Bat Boy eventually falls in love with the vet's daughter.

"Then, toward the end of the show, the big, deep dark secret of Bat Boy's parentage is revealed," Woodruff said.

The main character is played by 20-year-old Zak Schwartz. The fang-toothed teenager is the musical theater and professional acting major's first main role at ECU.

"And I've only had only two other lead roles before this one," he said.

Growing up in Raleigh, Schwartz was active in sports until his junior year of high school.

His first venture into acting was in third grade when he and a classmate were chosen as the lead roles for a version of the movie "Titanic."

"We kind of ran with it," Schwartz said.

His first actual stage play was "Winnie the Pooh" in the sixth grade, when he portrayed Christopher Robin. That same year he was Oliver in "Oliver Twist."

"That was my first real musical," he said. "I never had a voice lesson until I was a sophomore in high school."

Schwartz describes Bat Boy as vulnerable, even though he's essentially a vampire that feeds on blood.

Despite the seemingly dark side of Bat Boy, Schwartz says the show will be entertaining.

"This is, by far, one of the most fun roles I've ever played," Schwartz said. "In the beginning, he's this completely uncivilized creature that jumps around on stage. Then he goes through a transformation into being a very proper civilized person with an English accent."

Bat Boy is a very fragile character that gets attached to people easily.

"All he really wants to do is be accepted," Schwartz said. And that's the underlying message of the musical
— acceptance.

"At the end, the cast tells you what you should have learned," Schwartz said.

"Bat Boy" is semi-gory, in Woodruff's words, and may not be appropriate for all children.

"Older kids will laugh along with the adults," he said.

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NCCU program to aid high school students

DURHAM - A new program at N.C. Central University will let high school students take courses online.

The ECHS Virtual High School Program will be managed by NCCU’s Josephine Dobbs Clement Early College High School, which is on the university campus.

The program is designed to let "disadvantaged" youngsters complete their coursework at any time, day or night, and still work, while caring for younger siblings as they need to, according to an NCCU news release.

The hope: improve on the dropout rate. In Durham public schools, 37 percent of the students who started high school as a freshman four years earlier did not graduate in 2006-07.

The new program is subsidized by AT&T, which recently donated $69,000 to pay for laptops for 25 students, as well as other technological infrastructure.

Staff writer Eric Ferreri
Duke grad's Web site, and its vulgarity, gone

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Juicy Campus, a Web site that fostered vulgar, crass, anonymous gossip among college students, has shut down, a victim of the recession.

The online board, the brainchild of Duke University graduate Matt Ivester, was a popular place for college students to make crude comments about others — cloaked, naturally, in anonymity.

The Web site, which featured topics such as "Biggest slut on campus," vexed university administrators. Ivester created the Web site while at Duke.
Furloughs begin for Calif. state workers

SACRAMENTO (AP) — More than 200,000 state government employees were expected to stay home without pay Friday as California began its first-ever furlough, a move intended to save money during an ongoing fiscal crisis.

State agencies scrambled in the days before the furloughs took effect to avoid confusion for the public, such as people trying to register vehicles or obtain professional licenses.

MORE FURLoughS: AirTrain recalls furloughed pilots. hires attendants

Among the offices to be closed Friday are those of the Department of Motor Vehicles and Department of Consumer Affairs. The governor’s Office of Emergency Services also would be dark as part of a cash-saving move ordered by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Critical and revenue-generating agencies were scheduled to remain open, including fire stations, parks and employment centers that process unemployment insurance claims. California’s unemployment rate is 9.3%, a 15-year high.

Schwarzenegger ordered the two-day-a-month furloughs, reducing the average state worker’s salary by 9.2%, as he and lawmakers try to solve the state’s $42 billion budget shortfall.

The governor had hoped his order would apply to some 238,000 state employees, but each of the seven other constitutional officers have said they will not comply. Employees of the Legislature are not under his authority.

Schwarzenegger’s legal affairs secretary, Andrea Hoch, said the administration was prepared to sue the state controller if he did not reduce paychecks for more than 15,000 workers in the other constitutional offices, which include the attorney general, secretary of state and insurance commissioner.

A judge who affirmed Schwarzenegger’s authority to order the furloughs said his ruling did not apply to statewide elected officials because they were not a party to the lawsuit. The administration has maintained that employees of constitutional offices are covered by the furlough order.

Doors to about 180 DMV offices were to be locked Friday. Some people said the state gave little notice to the public about the furloughs, which will continue on the first and third Fridays of each month through June 2010.

“They don’t have any signs telling us about Friday,” said Ingrid Dela Cruz of Sacramento, who was inside a Sacramento DMV office on Thursday.

In fact, there were plenty of signs, but they were posted in locations invisible to most customers because they were hidden behind sliding glass doors.

Schwarzenegger’s administration estimated that cutting worker hours would save the state $1.3 billion over the next year-and-a-half.
The state decided to keep some 250 career centers open after previously announcing they would be closed. The centers are where the unemployed get information about job training and benefits.

Labor leaders said the furloughs could have been prevented. Jim Zamora, spokesman for Service Employees International Union, Local 1000, said the administration did not respond to the union’s latest contract proposal, which he said included alternatives.

"More than a week ago, Local 1000 presented the governor’s negotiators with a deal that would have prevented the closure of state offices, created an orderly, flexible and manageable furlough process, prevented chaos and saved the state hundreds of millions of dollars," Zamora said in a statement.

Jolley, whose office is negotiating with the union, declined to respond.

Some employees, including a group of engineers, said they were going to show up at work, anyway, despite the pay cut.

Craig Copelan, a senior engineer with the state Department of Transportation, said he has been working on a national safety manual with colleagues around the country and that Friday is the final day to turn in comments.

Other employees questioned whether the furloughs would result in taxpayer savings.

Dan Gurule, a police officer at the state mental hospital in Norwalk, said the state would have to pay overtime at 24-hour facilities to those workers who backfill the shifts of people on furlough.

Five state mental hospitals and 33 adult prisons are required to provide constant care to patients and inmates.

"Somebody has to fill in my position," Gurule said. "We still have to have a minimum staffing. That’s going to be someone on overtime, being paid time-and-a-half."

But the furlough may not be all that bad for state workers.

Squaw Valley ski resort at Lake Tahoe was offering $30 lift tickets — a $49 savings — on furlough days to state employees who show a valid state identification card or recent pay stub. Boreal ski resort also has a promotion in which state employees can ski or snowboard every Friday for the rest of the season for $20.

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NCAA preparing to bar some schools from postseason because of academics

By Steve Wieberg, USA TODAY

The NCAA is preparing to deliver an unprecedented threat to hand down postseason bans because of academic deficiencies, a prospect it says is facing as many as nine teams at eight Division I schools.

All are saddled with low Academic Progress Rates (APRs), which measure player retention and progress toward graduation. And all are seeking waivers to forestall the penalties.

Five of the teams have seen requests initially rejected, their hopes hanging on face-to-face hearings beginning in Indianapolis in 10 days or subsequent appeals to the NCAA Division I Board of Directors.

It's a notable step for the NCAA. It has long imposed bans on bowl and other postseason appearances for serious violations of its rules, but not until now has it used the penalty as a hammer in academic matters.

The men's basketball and baseball programs at Centenary are in the crosshairs, its athletics director says. Also needing waivers, according to officials at their respective schools, are Weber State's playoff-quarterfinal football team and a Texas-Arlington baseball program that claimed a Southland Conference championship and an NCAA tournament berth three years ago.

The threat hangs almost exclusively over non-marquee schools that often lack resources to pour into academic support, which has drawn fire from the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics and other watchdog groups.

The NCAA says that rather than punish them, its intent is to motivate chronically low-scoring schools and teams, regardless of pedigree, to alter their approach to academics.

"To deny a postseason opportunity is a step you don't take lightly," says Kevin Lennon, an NCAA vice president who helps oversee the program. "But if ... year after year, a program has not done well, I think you have to keep in mind what's the bigger student-welfare issue. It's making sure that they're doing well academically. And if it takes the threat or the implementation of a postseason ban to change that behavior, I think the committee is prepared to do it."

The severity of academic-related sanctions has escalated since APRs first were calculated five years ago, starting with public warnings and scholarship cuts and moving to practice restrictions for teams with perennially poor scores. Postseason bans would go to those with the lowest APRs and showing little or no annual improvement.

The NCAA will release the latest APRs for all Division I teams, along with penalties, in May. Any postseason sanctions would apply to the 2009-10 school year.

Big-name and small, deep-pocketed or not, most every school that plays Division I sports appears to have taken the initiative seriously.
At Texas-Arlington, for example, athletics director Pete Carlton says recruiters now take fewer chances on prospects with shaky academic backgrounds. Once arrived, athletes meet stepped-up efforts to keep them moving toward graduation. A change in baseball coaches a little more than a year ago was tied at least in part to low NCAA scores, Carlton says.

"The whole attitude changed with the new coach," he says. "You can see dramatic improvement from that point in time."

Will it be enough for the NCAA?

The Mavericks' baseball APR was 842 (on a scale of 1000) two years into the initiative, well beneath the 925 deemed acceptable by the NCAA and even shy of a secondary benchmark of 900. Teams beneath that are subject to stiffer penalties, eventually including a postseason ban.

But Carlton, a member of the association's 22-member Academic Council, points to the coaching change and other corrective measures that he says have helped raise the baseball team's grade-point average to better than 3.0 the past three semesters and improve its APR. "In talking to officials with the NCAA who work closely with the APR, the things we've put in place and implemented ... are exactly what they're looking for," he says.

"If we file (for) this waiver and are denied, I'm going to be really disappointed because we're doing everything we know to do make improvements."

Officials at four other schools acknowledge they're seeking waivers to avert postseason bans. Jacksonville State, Chattanooga and Weber State (all football) and Centenary (men's basketball and baseball). The Texas Southern men's tennis team also faces a ban, though it's moot; the school suspended the program for two years while going through a 2008 NCAA infractions case.

Many of the schools, like UTA, acknowledge academic problems in earlier years but say they've addressed them and have the improved APRs to prove it.
JuicyCampus, home to nasty school gossip, dries up

By JUSTIN POPE - 16 hours ago

Critics hoped the better angels of human nature would kill off the popular campus gossip site JuicyCampus.com. Some prosecutors were trying to use the law to do the trick.

In the end, the site's much-criticized founder insisted he was merely the latest victim of the economic downturn.

In any case, the site one college official recently called a "virtual bathroom wall" of hateful and degrading speech was offline Thursday — much to the relief of administrators and many students nationwide.

"We're very happy," said Erika Lowe, vice president of the student government at Western Illinois University, which had been working with administrators to block the site from campus computers there. "While we support free speech, there was nothing positive coming out of this Web site. It only served to dampen spirits and ruin friendships."

But JuicyCampus was popular. Following its launch on seven campuses in 2007, it spread nationwide, and founder Matt Ivester said the site was getting more than 1 million unique visitors monthly. He said it was all in good fun, but the anonymity the site granted its gossip-posters seemed to bring out the worst in people.

Fraternities and sororities cruelly attacked each other. Typical discussion threads included "Biggest slut on campus" and "easiest freshmen." Others identified women who had gained weight and one post named a rape victim and said she "deserved it."

Several student government associations asked their colleges to block access to the site from campus networks, and a handful — including Tennessee State and Hampton — did so. New Jersey prosecutors, meanwhile, were investigating whether the company was violating the state's Consumer Fraud Act. No charges were filed.

The site appeared to be protected by a federal law absolving Web sites of responsibility for what their users post. And most colleges decided they couldn't get into the business of picking and choosing sites to block. So they urged students to stay away and quietly hoped this day would come.

"To be tactful, I'm not disappointed," said David Maxwell, president of Drake University in Iowa. He had received complaints from parents and students, but declined to block the site when student leaders asked him to consider doing so.

"We certainly value the university environment as a safe haven for expression," Maxwell said. But academic freedom "also requires you to be held responsible for what you say. The anonymity of JuicyCampus was really a concern for us."

A public relations firm representing the company said Ivester was unavailable for a telephone interview Thursday, and the site was already offline. But in a farewell note on a separate blog site, Ivester wrote that "in these historically difficult economic times, online ad revenue has plummeted and venture capital funding has dissolved."

He denied that legal troubles were to blame, or that advertisers were avoiding JuicyCampus because of its content. The site employed about 20 people, according to spokesman Steven Wilson.

Ivester said posts would no longer be publicly available, and the site's privacy policy would continue — it would not release IP addresses without a subpoena. The site has said it blocks its discussion board from being indexed by search sites like Google.

He did acknowledge some users had gone overboard.

"While there are parts of JuicyCampus that none of us will miss — the mean-spirited posts and personal attacks — it has also been a place for the fun, lighthearted gossip of college life. I hope that is how it is remembered," he wrote, before signing off: "Keep it juicy."

On the Net:
- http://juicycampus.blogspot.com