

TURN BACK TIME

IT DOESN'T take long to reverse the effects of a damaging lifestyle. This week: Reduce high cholesterol in two weeks.

SWAP saturated fat for a cholesterol-lowering diet and within just 14 days your body will start clearing cholesterol from the blood, suggests Linda Main, dietetic adviser at the cholesterol charity Heart UK.



'In fact it's surprisingly easy to achieve the desirable blood cholesterol reading of 5 mmol/L (millimoles per litre),' she says.

Lowering saturated fat intake alone can achieve a 10 per cent reduction in "bad" LDL cholesterol levels and triglycerides.

Try basing meals on the Mediterranean diet (plenty of fruit, vegetables, olive oil and fish).

JANE FEINMANN

How snacking on almonds keeps blood sugar in check

EATING almonds may help control blood sugar levels, suggests a new study.

Researchers at the University of South Australia in Adelaide recruited 137 volunteers at risk of type 2 diabetes to the study.

The volunteers ate 43g of almonds a day, either with their breakfast or lunch or just as a snack.

Throughout the four-

week study, blood sugar levels were monitored, and compared with a four-week period during which they didn't snack on the nuts.

The results showed blood sugar levels rose less after meals including the nuts.

It's thought that the high fibre content in the almonds helps maintain a steady blood sugar level.

RESEARCHERS are developing a new blood test that uses tiny diamonds to measure iron levels in the body. Low iron levels trigger anaemia, leading to fatigue and breathlessness. Scientists from Ulm University in Germany say the test is more accurate than existing tests — the diamonds, which don't react with body tissues, have a coating that binds to ferritin, a protein that helps transport iron.

Aching feet? The hi-tech insoles that could help

AN ELECTRIC insole can help diagnose patients with foot or balance problems.

The ultra-thin insole, which has wireless sensors embedded in it, senses which areas of the foot are under the most pressure, helping to spot problems such as arthritis, or conditions that affect posture or gait.

The gadget contains 13 pressure sensors, an acceleration sensor and a temperature sensor. Data

from these is transmitted to a computer.

The device, called the OpenGo insole, was designed to help people recover from injuries or surgery, as the data from the insole helped physiotherapists tailor exercise regimens and treatment.

But the German manufacturers say it could help with non-medical areas, too, such as improving balance during a golf swing.

By PAT HAGAN

A TEN-SECOND blast of steam could be a promising new treatment for men with an enlarged prostate.

The experimental therapy uses steam to destroy excess tissue caused by benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), a non-cancerous condition in which the prostate 'grows' with age.

The prostate is a doughnut-shaped gland — around the size of a walnut — that wraps around the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder and out of the body. The gland tends to become larger as a man ages, possibly due to changing hormone levels.

As it grows it can press on the urethra, and the first sign of the condition is usually trouble passing urine, difficulty starting even when the bladder is full, and a need to urinate more frequently.

Treatment often involves alpha-blockers, drugs that relax muscle fibres within the prostate. Potential side-effects include dizziness and headaches.

Around 50,000 men a year require surgery to correct the problem after drug therapies have failed. However, existing techniques can have mixed results and carry a risk of impotence and urinary incontinence, as the nerves that control these functions lie close to the gland and can be damaged in the surgery.

THE new steam therapy has been developed as a quick and simple alternative, which avoids cutting into tissue close to these nerves. First, a narrow sheath — just a couple of millimetres wide — is fed through the urethra until it reaches the part where the urethra passes through the prostate gland.

A thin, hollow needle is then fed through the sheath and passed through the wall of the urethra and into the prostate.

Steam is blasted through the needle for around eight to ten seconds to destroy surrounding

Blast of steam to shrink an enlarged prostate

tissue cells. The heat from the steam also destroys the tiny blood vessels that feed the surplus prostate tissue with the nutrients needed to survive.

Within minutes, the cell starts to die and, as the blood supply dries

up, the extra tissue gradually degrades over a period of days or weeks. The procedure, which requires a local anaesthetic, takes around 30 minutes and can be performed as a day case. A trial is underway at 15 sites in the

DID YOU KNOW?

YOUR feet contain 25 per cent of the bones in your body, with 26 in each foot. Each hand has 27 bones, so more than half the bones in your entire body are in these four appendages alone.



Picture: ALAMY

U.S. with nearly 200 men. The results should be available in two to three years' time.

Commenting on the technique, Paul Miller, a urology surgeon at the British Prostate Centre in Brighton, said one of the main benefits of the new steam therapy could be that it causes no blood loss — which can occur with other surgical techniques.

But he stressed that treatments which aim to kill off enlarged tissue — rather than remove it — can make things worse before they get better.

'Initially there is swelling, due to inflammation or the body's reaction to any injury,' he said.

MEANWHILE, scientists are developing a genetic test that helps measure the severity and aggressiveness of a prostate cancer.

Often a 'watch and wait' policy is adopted with prostate tumours, as they can be slow-growing and not pose a problem to the patient, especially if they are elderly.

But now scientists from Columbia University in the U.S. have developed a test that looks for three genes in the tumour — if none are present, the cancer is deemed aggressive. The test has proved promising in early-stage trials, and if larger studies are successful, the team hopes to make it available in the next five years.

TINY TWEAKS

SIT DOWN to eat. A Canadian study found people who ate from plastic containers standing consumed 30 per cent more calories later in the day than those who ate while seated.

The researchers say meals eaten on the hoof feel like a snack, so people aren't as satisfied.



DO I REALLY NEED...

An electric toothbrush for babies and toddlers

Brush-Baby's BabySonic, £8.99, brushbaby.co.uk

THIS electric toothbrush has a small, soft-bristled head which vibrates rather than spins, which is apparently gentler and less alarming for babies and toddlers. It also has an easy-grip handle and a lit-up brush head that acts like a torch, helping guide parents brushing their child's mouth.

The toothbrush switches off after two minutes — the ideal length of time to clean teeth, says the manufacturer. It can be used from when the first tooth appears.

EXPERT VERDICT: This is easy for children to hold and inexpensive, says Professor Andrew Eder, a specialist in restorative dentistry at University College London's Eastman Dental Institute. But he adds: 'The last thing a small child may want coming at them is a vibrating toothbrush. Parents sometimes put a piece of gauze over their finger and clean their infant's teeth that way, or use a small manual toothbrush.'

'This won't necessarily clean a child's teeth any better — it's all down to dexterity. Two minutes is a long time to get an infant to stay still. It's possible to do the job in less time. Enamel on toddler teeth is thinner, so they need to be brushed effectively but softly.'

CARA LEE



Can a patch boost female sex drive?

SCIENTISTS are investigating whether a patch that releases testosterone into the bloodstream will boost female libido.

A woman's ovaries produce the hormone during her reproductive life but levels decline with age or when the ovaries are removed.

Testosterone is thought to be crucial to libido, but testosterone replacement is controversial and some reports suggest the hormone can increase cholesterol and insulin in women, raising the risk of heart disease.

Now a trial at Imperial College NHS Trust in London is looking at the effects of testosterone patches on blood vessel walls, insulin levels and sexual desire in women.

During the 12-week trial 20 women will wear the testosterone patch, and 20 women will wear a placebo patch.

Wine-drinkers may have lower risk of fractures

DRINKING wine may lower the risk of hip fractures in women.

In the study, based on 115,000 women aged 50 to 70, researchers from the University of California set out to compare the effects of different types of alcohol on the risk of developing a hip fracture.

Results show that women who preferred wine had a 22 per cent lower risk than non-drinkers and a 27 per cent lower risk than infrequent drinkers.

They also had a 13 per cent lower chance of a fracture than women who drank spirits, and a 28 per cent lower risk than beer drinkers.

It's thought the antioxidants found in wine help to protect bones from damage.

Magnet therapy to aid stroke recovery

WEAK magnetic fields are being tested as a treatment for stroke.

In a new clinical trial at the Biomedico University in Italy patients are being exposed to a magnetic field within two days of suffering a stroke — neurologists will use the therapy on nine patients for five consecutive days.

The sessions will involve patients wearing a type of headband that creates a weak magnetic field, and will last for up to four hours a day.

The patient's condition will then be monitored for a year.

Just how it could work is not clear, but a small study at the Università Cattolica, also in Italy, found that just 45 minutes of treatment triggered increased brain activity.