

## Recent Developments

### Apparel and Textiles

#### IFI Strikes Back at Invalid Breast Cancer "Study"

The International Fabricare Institute (IFI) is refuting the implications of a story picked up recently by the Associated Press and broadcast across the nation. The story, summarizing a report detailing the incidence of breast cancer in Newton, Massachusetts, suggested that environmental factors such as dry cleaning and lawn services could be involved. IFI officials charged that the story was unfair and without scientific documentation. The epidemiologist with Silent Springs who led the study was quoted in the Boston Globe as saying, "We don't know that any of these factors are breast cancer risks at this point." The implications of the study were damaging enough and made worse because the Associated Press unjustifiably suggested that dry cleaning could be a cause when no supporting evidence exists.

The Environmental Protection Agency continues to monitor perc, the primary solvent used in dry cleaning. Their own Science Advisory Board concluded that "there is no compelling evidence of human cancer risk" for perc. Given the stringent environmental regulations that cleaners must follow, perc is safe for cleaners and consumers.

**Source:** Clothes Care Gazette, November 1999

**Contributed by:** Ellen T. Miller, Extension Assistant, Apparel and Textiles

### Food and Nutrition

#### Weight Loss For Obese Individuals May Result in Significant Health Benefits

A recent study reported in the *American Journal of Public Health* suggests a modest sustainable weight loss of 10 percent in obese individuals even though they do not reach an ideal weight or the reported healthy body mass index (BMI) may result in improved health and economic benefits.

Researchers assessed the relationship between BMI and the economic cost and health risks associated with obesity-related diseases including heart disease, hypercholesterolemia, hypertension, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. They found that depending upon age, initial BMI, and

gender, a sustained 10 percent weight reduction would result in 0.3 to 0.8 fewer years of hypercholesterolemia, 1.2 to 2.9 fewer years of life with hypertension, and 0.5 to 1.7 fewer years with type 2 diabetes. The sustained weight loss should lead to a 12 to 38 cases per 1000 reduction in the lifetime incidence of coronary heart disease and stroke and should increase life expectancy by 2 to 7 months. The reduction of years lived with these chronic diseases should result in lowering medical costs up to \$2200 to \$5300 for each obese person.

**Source:** Oster G, Thompson D, Edelsber J, et al. Lifetime Health and Economic Benefits of Weight Loss Among Obese Persons. *Am J Public Health*, 1999;89:1536-1542.

**Submitted by:** Jackie McClelland, Food and Nutrition Specialist.

### **FDA Issues Final Ruling on Dietary Supplement Claims**

The federal Food and Drug Administration has issued its final rule regarding claims that can be made for dietary supplements. Under the regulations already in place, supplement labels can make what are called structure/function claims ---- those related to a product's ability to affect the structure and/or functioning of the body ---- without prior FDA review, while a claim related to disease prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, and/or treatment needs pre-market approval. This latest ruling clarifies the definition of "disease," narrowing it to cover only serious conditions such as toxemia during pregnancy, Alzheimer's disease, and osteoporosis. This allows labels to make claims regarding a product's ability to treat and/or prevent a wide variety of common, less serious conditions, such as acne, PMS, and hot flashes that are considered a normal part of the life cycle, without having to provide any evidence as to their truthfulness ahead of time.

Although manufacturers are required to have documentation on file to support such claims, it is unrealistic to suppose that this information is rigorously checked. It should be noted as well that, according to this ruling, obesity is a disease, but overweight is not. Thus a worthless diet pill could get around FDA scrutiny simply by avoiding an explicit obesity-related claim, suggesting instead that it aids in weight loss.

FDA indicates that it is acting in response to consumer demand for more information regarding the value and uses of dietary supplements; however, many health professionals are worried that the relaxation of the regulations will result in the aggressive marketing of even more products of questionable merit. The burden of evaluating the potential efficacy of all these new claims will fall on the consumer. This makes the extension agent's programming in this area even more vital than before.

**Source:** FDA Talk Paper: FDA finalizes Rules for Claims on Dietary Supplements. <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~lrd/tpdsclm.html>

**Contributed by:** Sarah L. Ash, Assistant Professor, Departments of Animal Science and Family and Consumer Sciences.

### **Weight Loss Attempts Associated with Weight Gain**

Researchers collected information regarding initial weight, attempts at weight loss, and weight after 6 and 15 years from more than 7,000 men and women who were part of the Finnish Twin Cohort. After controlling for a variety of factors, such as smoking and alcohol use, they found an increased risk for major weight gain (greater than 10 kg) in those not initially overweight at baseline but who were still trying to lose weight, and among older women (30-54 y) who were initially overweight. This provides further evidence that dieting itself can contribute to weight gain and, in particular, that those who diet when they don't need to put themselves at risk for future weight problems. The use of twins also allowed researchers to evaluate the effect of genetics on weight and weight gain patterns as well. According to the authors, "much of the observed relationship between weight loss attempts and major weight gain can be attributed to familial predisposition to gain weight. However, any such genetic effects do not signify that attempts to modify the environment in a healthier direction are likely to fail." Thus, while weight gain may have a strong genetic component, weight management is still important.

**Source:** Korkeila, M. et al. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 1999;70:965-75

**Contributed by:** Sarah L. Ash, Assistant Professor, Departments of Animal Science and Family and Consumer Sciences

### **Housing and House Furnishings**

#### **Housing Our Elders**

HUD USER NEWS announces a new HUD report, "Housing Our Elders: A Report Card on the Housing Conditions and Needs of Older Americans." While the report does indicate many positive findings for the elderly and their housing, there are still a number of challenges that need to be addressed. HUD lists some of the key findings of the report:

- 1.45 million elderly households live in housing that needs repair or rehabilitation
- Almost 1.7 million elderly households with low incomes are in critical need of affordable housing because they spend in excess of 50 percent of their incomes for housing
- Most elderly renters pay more than 50 percent of their incomes for housing

- Approximately 1.1 million elderly households report unmet needs for home modifications
- There is a shortage of both owner-occupied and rental housing that is fully accessible

For additional information, or to order this report, contact HUD USER, P.O. Box 6091, Rockville, MD 20850, 1-800-245-2691 or <http://www.huduser.org/publications/hsgspec/housec.html>

**Source:** "Housing Our Elders: A Report Card on the Housing Conditions and Needs of Older Americans," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

**Submitted by:** Sarah Kirby, Housing Specialist.

### **Housing Affordability**

In "The Widening Gap: New Findings on Housing Affordability in America," HUD reports that affordable housing remains as a real concern for many Americans. The report has four key findings:

- Despite robust economic expansion, the supply of affordable housing stock for struggling American families continues to shrink.
- Rents for housing in America are on the rise. In 1997 and 1998, rents increased at twice the rate of general inflation.
- While available affordable housing declines, the number of renters at or below 30 percent of median income is increasing.
- The void between renter households that are struggling and housing that is affordable to them is large and increasing.

**Source:** "The Widening Gap: New Findings on Housing Affordability in America," September 1999, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

**Submitted by:** Sarah Kirby, Housing Specialist.

## Human Development

### When School Is Out: The Future of Children

There are 39 million American children between the ages of 5 and 14, yet the United States has no organized system for providing supervision, activities, and opportunities to them during the hours when school is not in session. "When School Is Out" is a one of many extensive reports funded and published by the David and Lucille Packard Foundation in their series called *The Future of Children*.

"When School Is Out" discusses four major hurdles that are barriers to developing programs to serve school-age children. A series of recommendations are made in the report and multiple articles explore specific programs more in depth. For additional information on this and other *Future of Children* reports, e-mail the Packard Foundation at [circulation@futureofchildren.org](mailto:circulation@futureofchildren.org) or visit their web site at <http://www.futureofchildren.org>. Their mailing address is: The David and Lucille Packard Foundation, 200 Second Street, Suite 200, Los Altos, CA 94022.

**Source:** Packard Foundation, (1999). When School is Out. *The Future of Children*, Volume 9 (2). Los Altos, CA.

**Submitted by:** Karen DeBord, Child Development Specialist.

### Grandparenting Survey

Recent research by the American Association of Retired Persons has revealed that most grandparents have strong relationships and regular contact with their grandchildren. In a study of 823 grandparents age 50 and over, the researchers found that 82 percent had seen a grandchild in the past month. The top five activities in which grandparents engaged with their grandchildren were eating together, watching a TV comedy, staying overnight, shopping for clothes, and engaging in exercise/sports. The authors emphasize that the study provides a counterpoint to media reports which feature evidence of family breakdown. The full results of the scientific study can be found in a 120-page report issued in November 1999 "The AARP Grandparenting Survey: The Sharing and Caring Between Mature Grandparents and Their Grandchildren" which is available in full text on-line (see below).

**Source:** <http://research.aarp.org/general/grandpsurv.pdf>

**Submitted by:** Luci Bearon, Adult Development/Aging Specialist.

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