

Study casts doubt on anti-cancer benefit of selenium

□ Harvard scientists found that ordinary consumption of the mineral failed to protect women from cancer and supplement users actually had a higher risk.

WASHINGTON (AP) — A large study of American nurses casts doubt on the alleged anticancer properties of the mineral selenium, finding the amount consumed by most U.S. women doesn't lower their risk. The trace mineral gained wide

attention when scientists found high doses protected animals against cancer, and supplements now often are marketed as antioxidant cancer fighters. Research in people is mixed and little has been done on women, so Harvard scientists decided to study selenium in women.

They found that ordinary consumption of selenium failed to protect women from cancer, and that the handful of selenium supplement users actually had a slightly higher risk of the disease, although they cautioned that there was no proof the selenium was to blame.

"This is a carefully conducted study by good investigators, but we still don't have a final answer," said Dr. Peter Greenwald of the National Cancer Institute.

"I don't think people should be making the decision to stop taking selenium or start taking selenium" based on current data, said Dr. Larry Clark of the Arizona Cancer Center. He is testing selenium supplements against dummy pills to see if they protect cancer survivors.

Selenium is found in seafood, liver and vegetables grown in selenium-rich soil. Some scientists suspect it prevents cancer because people from areas with selenium-rich soil have less cancer and those in selenium-poor regions have more.

The Harvard study, published in Wednesday's Journal of the National Cancer Institute, measured selenium in the toenail clippings of 62,641 female nurses in 1982. Dietary

selenium is deposited in nails, reflecting consumption over the previous year.

The doctors had already found that selenium didn't protect the nurses against breast

Selenium consumption ranged from 60 to 150 micrograms a day. But higher levels didn't protect women, concluded Harvard epidemiologist Miriam Garland.

risky, merely that it is protective, Garland said.

Also, the 41 women who took selenium supplements were times as likely to have cancer as women who didn't. That's a statistically significant finding, she said, but she cautioned people to draw conclusions from the study with caution.

"Our data don't support the idea that selenium supplements, if taken in high doses, should just be cautious as selenium can be high doses," she concludes.

Until the results of the government's daily recommended allowance of 55 micrograms for women and 70 for men.

"If women still wish to take selenium supplements, they should just be cautious as selenium can be toxic at high doses."

— Miriam Garland, Harvard epidemiologist

cancer. This time, they looked at 503 nurses diagnosed with other cancers between 1982 and 1986, demographically matching them with cancer-free nurses for comparison.

Higher selenium slightly increased the risk of colorectal cancer, melanoma and lung cancer. The figures weren't statistically significant, meaning they don't indicate selenium is

Computer program designed to find security gaps released free on Internet

□ The SATAN software creator says it will make it more difficult to break into computer systems.

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — Computer security experts could be in for a devil of a time from SATAN when its creator distributes it free on the Internet on Wednesday.

SATAN is a new piece of software designed to find security gaps in computer systems and make them harder to crack, and Dan Farmer and his partner are releasing it despite fears that hackers will use it to execute break-ins.

"As far as abuse goes, I think it will actually decrease because people can make better decisions about improving their security," Farmer said Tuesday.

SATAN, which stands for Security Administrators Tool for Analyzing Networks, lets people who run computer systems directly linked to the Internet

find security holes.

While there have been similar programs, and serious hackers already are familiar with ways of breaking into computer systems, experts say SATAN is significant because it is easy enough for novices to use.

Youngsters could easily play computer pranks, on-line vandals could scramble a hospital's medical records and white-collar criminals could steal corporate secrets, said Donn Parker, a computer security consultant with SRI International, a consulting company in Menlo Park.

"It's like any other powerful tool: It can be used for great good and great harm," Parker said.

Farmer, who lives in San Francisco, developed SATAN with Wietse Venema, a security expert at the University of Eindhoven in the Netherlands. They first planned to release the program on the Internet on April 1.

Parker said Farmer should have sold SATAN only to experts

guarding computer systems, and he disputed the argument that SATAN will help protect against electronic intrusion.

Experts agree that the average home computer user won't be affected, and the military's computers holding classified information are isolated and also

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are not at risk.

Computer security experts at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory near San Francisco have developed a program that alerts computer operators to SATAN attacks.

The program sounds an alarm and identifies the computer where the intrusion originated. It also is available free on the Internet.

Secondhand smoke promotes heart disease in nonsmokers, study suggests

□ Researchers found that secondhand smoke damages the lining of arteries and helps "bad" cholesterol bind to artery walls.

CHICAGO (AP) — Nonsmokers are much more sensitive to heart damage from secondhand smoke than smokers are because their bodies haven't built up defenses against the onslaught of tobacco poisons, researchers say.

"The cardiovascular system adapts to insults," said Stanton A. Glantz, a professor of medicine at the University of California at San Francisco and an anti-smoking activist.

The conclusion is not new but was drawn from the most complete review to date of studies on how secondhand smoke affects the heart and blood vessels.

It also heightens the debate over secondhand smoke, indicating that even small amounts

can endanger nonsmokers. The tobacco industry claims that the link between secondhand smoke and heart disease is unproven and that, in any case, nonsmokers breathe in very little cigarette smoke.

Glantz and Dr. William W. Parmley, chief of cardiology at UCSF, pulled together data from more than 80 previous studies. Their review is published in Wednesday's issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association.

About 47,000 people a year die from heart disease caused by secondhand smoke, and 150,000 others suffer nonfatal heart attacks, according to an analysis prepared last year for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. An estimated 3,000 people die of lung cancer annually because of secondhand smoke, OSHA said.

"The tobacco companies are claiming that levels of secondhand smoke in workplaces are very, very low, that you have to sit at a smoky bar for a thousand years to inhale the equivalent of

one cigarette," Glantz said. His paper shows that trying to passively smoke without smoking is just meaningless.

The researchers said secondhand smoke reduces the carrying ability of blood vessels, heart's ability to use the oxygen it receives, forcing the heart to pump harder and making it more exhausting.

Also, secondhand smoke activates blood cells called platelets, promoting clots that can cause heart attacks. In addition, activated platelets can damage the lining of arteries and the development of fatty deposits, a major component of heart disease, studies have shown.

Aside from that, secondhand smoke also helps so-called "bad" cholesterol help it bind to arteries, where it further contributes to fatty deposits, studies have shown.

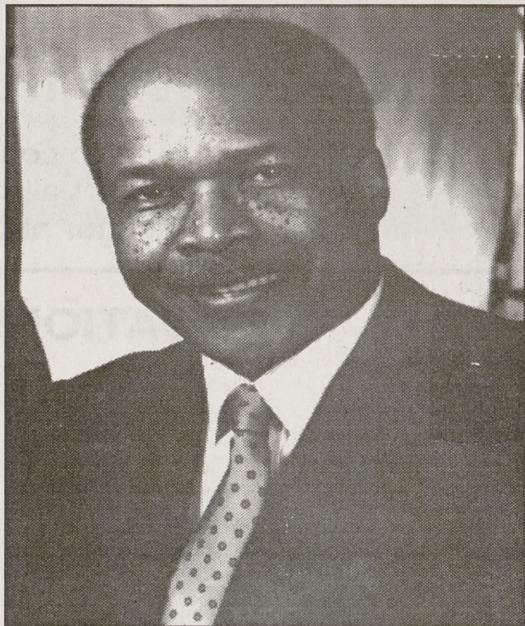
The nicotine in secondhand smoke interferes with the body's ability to neutralize the highly reactive and destructive free radicals known as free radicals, researchers said.



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