

Ask the Experts

Have a health-related question?

Send it to us at *Bottom Line/Health*, Box 10702, Stamford, CT 06904-0702... or via e-mail to BLHealth@Boardroom.com.

Low BP Alert

I know that high blood pressure increases one's risk for dementia. But my doctor says that low blood pressure does, too. Is that true?

Possibly. Having high blood pressure (above 140/90 mmHg) throughout midlife is a *major* risk factor for dementia later in life. Lower pressure in younger adults does not necessarily harm the brain. However, blood pressure that is consistently far below the normal 120/80 in older people can signal reduced blood flow to the brain, which can raise risk for cognitive decline and dementia. Older adults' brains are less able to compensate for the reduced blood flow. Similarly, new research has linked diastolic (bottom number) blood pressure under 70 in adults with cardiovascular disease to increased risk for brain atrophy, which can lead to dementia.

Majid Fotuhi, MD, PhD, author of *Boost Your Brain* (HarperOne) and founder and chief medical officer, NeurExpand Brain Center, Lutherville, Maryland. NeurExpand.com

Safe to kiss?

I recently started dating a man who has occasional cold sores on his lips. When is it safe for me to kiss him?

A cold sore is a group of small blisters around the mouth, usually caused by the herpes simplex 1 virus. Most initial infections occur in childhood. The virus is stored in an underlying nerve under the skin, and recurrences can emerge periodically, usually around the border of the lip, after a cold, stress or a sunburn.

When a cold sore is present, close contact (kissing or sharing objects



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such as lip balm) should be avoided until the sore is completely healed. Even when there's no apparent cold sore, an infected person can spread the infection. But by adulthood, most people have been exposed to the virus, which builds their immunity so they may not get cold sores.

Lynne J. Goldberg, MD, professor of dermatology and pathology & laboratory medicine, Boston University School of Medicine.

High creatinine

In a recent blood test my creatinine level was high. Any advice?

A high creatinine level (over 1.3 mg/dL for men, over 1.1 mg/dL for women) means that your kidneys aren't functioning as well as they should. You need an evaluation from a kidney specialist (nephrologist).

Meanwhile, because creatinine is a substance that is formed when food is metabolized, eating certain foods and avoiding others may lower creatinine levels and reduce stress on the kidneys—improving kidney function. For example, to reduce creatinine, minimize your intake of animal proteins (meat, poultry and fish) and eat lots of vegetables.

Drinking a cup or two of nettle leaf tea each day also can help flush creatinine from the body, but check first with your doctor if you take medication or have a chronic condition. Chitosan supplements (avoid these if you're allergic to shellfish) also can

reduce creatinine levels. Follow label instructions. But make sure you do see a nephrologist!

Joseph Kellerstein, ND, a naturopathic physician in private practice in Toronto and Oshawa, Ontario, Canada. DrJoeND.com

Does glucosamine work?

I keep hearing that glucosamine supplements don't work, but they seem to help my arthritis pain. Are these supplements worth taking?

It depends on what kind of glucosamine you are using. Only glucosamine sulfate has been shown to be effective in reducing osteoarthritis pain. Sulfate helps the body produce cartilage. That is why researchers believe this form works better than glucosamine hydrochloride or N-acetyl glucosamine, neither of which has sulfate. Studies have shown that glucosamine sulfate reduces pain about as much as *acetaminophen* and the nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs *ibuprofen* and *piroxicam*. But NSAIDs relieved arthritis pain in about two weeks, while glucosamine sulfate took up to 12 weeks.

If glucosamine sulfate works for you, keep taking it. The recommended dose is generally 1,500 mg a day.

David Borenstein, MD, clinical professor of medicine, The George Washington University Medical Center, Washington, DC. DrBorenstein.com



"My doctor told me to stop having intimate dinners for four...unless there are three other people."

—Orson Welles

American actor, writer and director (1915–1985)