

[The Washington Post]

HEALTH

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TUESDAY, MAY 17, 2005

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THIS WEEK IN HEALTH

Moving Crew



Playing Out of Bounds Tchoukball, paddle battle, pillow dancing and other curious ways to get your 30-minute activity dose. F3

Good Questions

Intimacy in a Flash Got a minute or three? You can (an author contends) improve your relationship. F3

The System

No Appointment Necessary For a quick check and an Rx, drop by a MinuteClinic for a workup by a nurse practitioner. F2

My Time

Not-So-Young Love When two people with plenty of life experience marry, they sing a different wedding song. F8

20 Years Ago

2005 marks the 20th anniversary of The Washington Post Health section. A look back:



From May 15, 1985 We report on tPA, an experimental clot-busting drug that "might be of immense clinical value" for heart attacks. Early results are so promising the New England Journal of Medicine rushes the study into print. . . . Cold War health fears continue, with a report stating that carcinogenic chemicals released after an atomic blast "could be of greater significance" than nuclear fallout. . . . and a Baylor College of Medicine study finds that many patients' end-of-life wishes are not followed, resulting in their being sustained by measures they requested not to have.

LEAN PLATE CLUB

Sally Squires

Middle Ground
On BMI

First, scientists estimated that overweight and obesity claimed 400,000 U.S. lives annually. Now just a year later, another team of researchers has revised those figures downward by 75 percent and published the results in



the prestigious Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

So do extra pounds shorten life or not?

Yes, but it's not as straightforward as you might think. And if you're feeling confused, you're not alone.

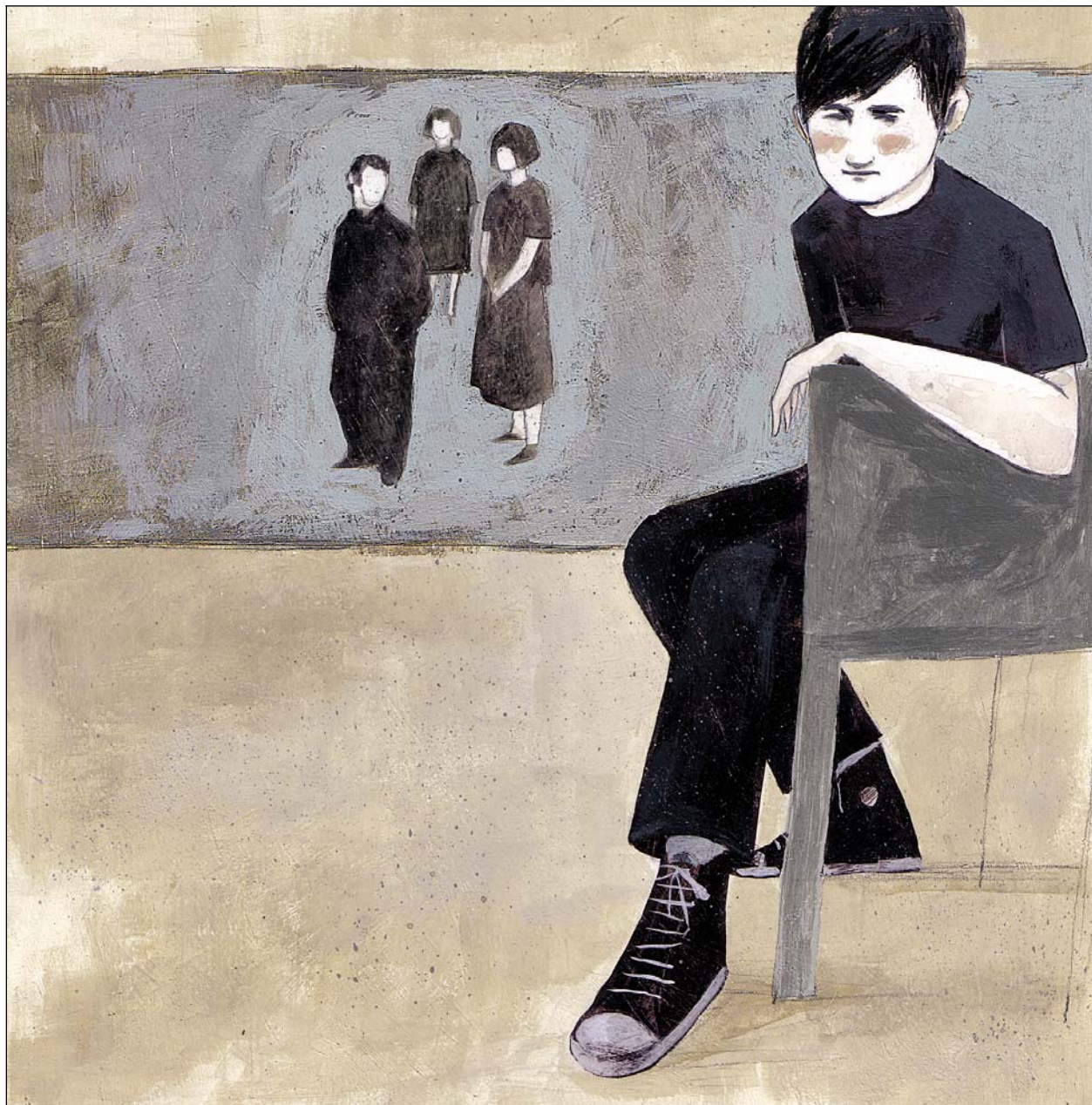
"I didn't realize how anxious people have been about weight until my study came out," said Katherine M. Flegal, an epidemiologist at the National Center for Health Statistics and co-author of the JAMA study, which drew from five large, federally funded surveys conducted from 1971 to 2002. Flegal and her colleagues found that 112,000 people die in the United States annually from weight-related illnesses.

Those numbers still make obesity a major killer, just not as lethal as some other scientists have thought. Consider obesity, Flegal said, as akin to having high blood cholesterol, elevated blood pressure or high blood sugar. "You need to treat it, but there's no need to go crazy about it," she said.

As for being overweight, Flegal and her colleagues have found that carries an even lower risk of death.

Flegal's study didn't measure the contribution of weight to a host of chronic diseases from type 2 diabetes and hypertension to premature heart

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BY CARMEN SEGOVIA FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The Choice of Life

In the Aftermath of a Son's Suicide Attempt, a Family Wonders What Went Wrong — and How the Warning Signs Escaped Notice

By GAIL GRIFFITH
Special to The Washington Post

On Saturday evening, March 10, 2001, my 17-year-old son, Will, returned from an evening of bowling with friends. He sat at the kitchen table and told me he'd had a great night: He bowled over 100 twice in a row, he said, and then he, his girlfriend and cousin went to a pizza joint afterward. He appeared cheerful and light.

"You seem to be feeling a lot better, Will," I told him. It wasn't a casual remark; Will had been diagnosed with major depression in the fall of 2000, and after an agonizing and worrisome few months, he appeared to be shaking

it off. I thought the latest medications were finally beginning to take effect. Or maybe it was just the passage of time, but by all markers, he looked as though he was genuinely on the mend.

"Yeah, Mom, I think I am better. No, really, I think I'm okay."

I kissed him on the forehead and went to bed buoyed by our exchange. For the first time in months I felt confident that we, that he, had turned the corner.

Will watched the basketball playoffs with his stepister and her friends for an hour or so. He then went to his bedroom, wrote out four suicide notes and at 3 a.m. ingested 100 times the

normal dose of the sedative antidepressant Remeron, washed down with a bottle of Snapple Iced Tea.

I discovered Will late the next morning in his bed, semi-conscious, gagging and incoherent, his heart racing and skin covered in sweat. We rushed him to the emergency room at George Washington University Hospital. After a day-long battle by a medical team to stabilize his vital signs, we came face to face with the devastating realization that our son had attempted to take his own life. It was the worst moment of my life.

Thankfully, Will survived.

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Fighting Fat in a Fortnight



BY DUDLEY M. BROOKS—THE WASHINGTON POST

The author, left, and classmate Susan Barner perform a get-fit-quick workout from their Annapolis gym's two-week "bikini body" camp.

You and A

New Clues
On Sudden
Death

Risks Tied to Simple
Heart Rate Measures

By ELIZABETH AGNIVALL
Special to The Washington Post

Scientists last week reported findings that could help doctors predict who is at risk for sudden cardiac death (SCD). This question has dogged cardiologists for years, since it's estimated that more than 300,000 Americans die each year when their hearts suddenly stop. Many have none of the usual risk factors for heart disease. Learning to identify people at high risk for SCD is a high priority among researchers.

The study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, found the risk of sudden death was about four times higher in men whose hearts beat fast while resting (75 beats per minute or higher) or didn't speed up very much during exercise (lower than 89 beats per minute while exercising), when compared to men with normal heart rates at those times.

Sudden death was twice as likely in men whose heart rates slowed down by less than 25 beats per minute during the minute after exercise ended, compared with men with normal shifts in their heart rate.

The report was based on records of more than 5,000 French men with no known risk of heart disease who received exercise stress tests. Stress test results of those who later died of sudden cardiac arrest were compared with those who did not die that way.

So what does all of this mean for you and your risk of SCD? Experts say, as usual, that one study ought not to drive important health care decisions. But viewed in context, the report offers some important new insights into the deadly condition and who may be at risk. To understand these better, we spoke with Michael Lauer, director of clinical research in cardiology for the Cleveland Clinic, who has conducted extensive research in stress tests and cardiovascular health. Lauer was not involved in the study but is familiar with it.

Will this study help doctors identify people who don't have the usual risk factors for heart disease but who may be at risk for sudden cardiac death?

Yes. This is another component of measuring risk. What we've determined is that with the standard risk factors of cholesterol, diabetes and high blood pressure, we can do a very good job of identifying most people who are at risk for sudden cardiac death and for heart disease in general. But there are two problems. Number one is that there are still some people who are at risk,

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For a Mom With Six
Kids, Could Bikini
Camp Really Help?

By JANICE LYNCH SCHUSTER
Special to The Washington Post

When I signed up for my Annapolis gym's two-week "Bikini Body Camp," I tried to be realistic: In two weeks, I'd be happy to have a wedgie-free body, or at least one that could sit by the swimming pool in comfort, not camouflage. With six children, including a 3-year-old, I wanted to be able to chase the youngest around the community pool without trying to hold my sarong in place. And maybe pump up my health so I'd live long enough to watch him chase his brood one day.

The signs advertising the class, based on trainer David Kirsch's "The Ultimate New York Body Plan" book, promised quick results. Follow a two-week diet and fitness routine, and lose miraculous amounts of pounds and inches. Of course, we've heard all this before. But a miracle was what it would take, I thought, to get my body anywhere near a bathing suit, much less a bikini.

At 42, I have been packing 171 pounds on a 5-4 frame for more than five years. I'd made half-hearted attempts at dieting, spending a few hundred dollars on books and e-diets, thinking the money I'd spent would motivate me. It never did. Anyway, I know the secret to successful weight loss: Eat less. Move more. Repeat forever. But I just couldn't seem to do it on my own.

In six months of working out six days a week, I'd lost a few inches from my tush—but not enough to drop a dress size. What

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