



# an **A** to **Z** look at some facts we learnt in **2005**

**A. Acupuncture:** In a study of 50 patients suffering with fibromyalgia done by Mayo Clinic doctors, six acupuncture treatments given over two to three weeks significantly improved the symptoms of pain and fatigue.



**Allergies:** A new study of the 10 most common allergies finds that 54% of the US population suffers from at least one. The good news, according to the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*: one of the most dangerous allergies, to peanuts, is also the least widespread, affecting only 9% of the population. Topping the list are dust mites, rye, ragweed and cockroaches, with more than 25% of Americans allergic to each.

**B. Out of Breath:** In a study of 17,991 patients, people who had shortness of breath but no known heart diseases were four times as likely to die within three years as those who breathed easily.

**C. Common Cold:** The millions of people who buy Echinacea to prevent or relieve cold symptoms may be wasting their money according to a new study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. In a test of 500 subjects, those taking the herb fared no better than those taking a placebo.

**D.** 76% of **doctors** in the US believe in God (83% of all Americans do). But, according to the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, compared with the general public, M.D.s are:

- 26 times as likely to be Hindu
- 6 times as likely to be Buddhist
- 5 times as likely to be Muslim.

622,000 – Lives expected to be lost to **Diabetes** in the US each year by 2025—nearly triple the number in 2000—according to the Yale Schools of Public Health and Medicine.

**E. Evening primrose oil,** pressed from the flower's seeds, is rich in gammalinolenic acid, a substance that a new study in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* found inhibits a gene that causes nearly 30% of breast-cancer cases.

**F. Fitness cost:** Americans spent \$5 billion on Fitness equipment in 2004. That's nearly double the \$2.8 billion spent in 1994, according to the National Sporting Goods Association.

**Facial expressions:** It pays to get mad. In a small study published in *Biological Psychiatry*, subjects who made angry facial expressions in stressful situations – like having to count quickly back from 6,233 by 13 – had smaller blood-pressure spikes and lower levels of stress hormones than those who responded with facial expressions of fear.

**G. Ginkgo biloba:** Taking ginkgo biloba supplements for at least six months may lower the risk of ovarian cancer by 60%, report doctors at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital.



In the lab, ginkgo also stopped some ovarian-cancer cells from growing.

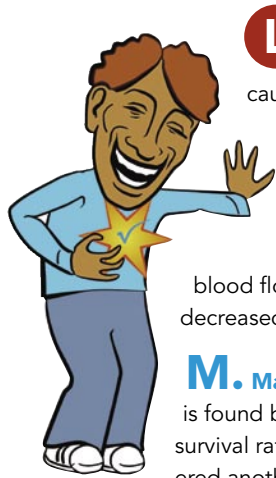
**H. Homeopathy:** Lots of alternative therapies are effective, but according to the journal *Lancet*, homeopathy isn't one of them. In a review of 220 studies, researchers found it was no better than a placebo.

40 Million: Estimated number of people infected with **HIV** worldwide, double the number a decade ago according to a new UN report.



## Just the Facts

180,000: Number of **hepatitis A** infections that could be prevented each year in the US with child vaccinations, according to a CDC advisory panel that unanimously recommended routine vaccination of all 1- and 2-year-olds.



**L. Laughter** increases blood flow by causing the inner lining of blood vessels (the endothelium) to expand, according to a small study of healthy moviegoers who were shown both funny and distressing clips from films and then tested for the physical effects of each. With laughter, blood flow increased 22%; under stress, it decreased 35%.

**M. Mammogram:** Women whose breast cancer is found by mammogram may have a 53% better survival rate than those whose cancer is discovered another way says a study at Houston's M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

**N.** A **Norwegian** study of testicular-cancer survivors offers hope for would-be dads: 71% fathered children within 15 years, though conception was less likely with men who had the most aggressive treatment.

**O. Obesity:** 24.5% of US adults are obese, up from 23.7% in 2003 according to the public health advocacy group Trust for America's Health.

**P. Pollution:** Kids living within one-half of a kilometre from bus and train stations and exposed to excess engine exhaust were 12 times as likely to die of cancer as other kids, according to a British study of 22,458 children claimed by the disease.

**Puberty:** Overweight girls are likelier than slimmer ones to start menstruating before age 12. They're also eight times as likely to become overweight adults. A new study in *Pediatrics* claims that being overweight appears to kick-start puberty.

**R. Risk of crashing:** A Penn State study finds that a truck driver's risk of crashing is three times as high during the last hour of a haul as during the first.

**Risk of strokes:** Sleep apnea has been linked to heart disease, but a new study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that it also significantly raises the risk of strokes.

**S. Stress:** A Danish study suggests that high levels of stress may have at least one benefit: a lower risk of breast cancer. In the 18-year survey of more than 6,500 women, those who were most frazzled were 40% less likely to develop breast cancer than low-stress ladies. But doctors warn that stress puts you at risk for a host of other ailments, such as heart disease.

**T. TV:** Two studies in the *Journal of Pediatrics* put hard numbers on the risks associated with watching more than the recommended maximum of two hours of TV a day. In one study, every extra hour of weekend TV at age 5 increased by 7% the chances of being obese at age 30. In a second study, 11-year-old girls who watched more than two hours a day were more than twice as likely to be overweight as girls who tuned in less.

**Twenty-nine:** Initial weeks of the human gestation period during which a fetus cannot feel pain, according to a controversial new study.

**U. 1-in-25:** Number of fathers who may be **unknowingly** raising a child who is not biologically their own, according to a study in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*.



**V. Visible Minorities:** A study at the University of California at San Diego found that magazines targeted at visible minorities, such as *Ebony* and *Latina*, had proportionally double the ads for junk food, cigarettes and alcohol and one-fourth as many health-promoting ads as mags like *Good Housekeeping*.

**W. Women** undergo fewer diagnostic tests and are one-third less likely than men to receive invasive treatments, such as angioplasty, for acute coronary syndromes, according to a study of more than 12,000 patients in 28 countries.

**Y. Youngsters** who took gym classes that maximized movement and focused on fitness-boosting activities like walking and cycling showed more fat loss and cardiovascular improvement than kids in standard P.E.

**Z. Zinc:** A study by researchers at the Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center in North Dakota found that seventh-graders who took 20 mg of zinc – double the recommended dietary allowance – five days a week for as long as three months outperformed their peers on tests of memory, word recognition, attention and learning.