

How do we solve the problem of dehumanization?

"Evolution, revolution, gun control, sounds of soul, shoot a rocket to the moon, kids growing up too soon."

"Ball of Confusion (That's What The World Is Today)" by the Temptations.

When the Temptations sang this song in 1970 society was trying to recover from the rebellion of 1960s. As we approach the new millennium, Ball of Confusion doesn't quite capture today's emotional tone. School kids shooting each other and the incomprehensible torture-murder of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas, are some examples of how dehumanized we've become.

In past articles, I wrote about society being negatively conditioned by chronic exposure to violence and other inhumane behavior. My concern now is how privatized and isolated we've become. I believe this promotes aggression and violence.

When a new family moves into the neighborhood who we welcome or ignore them? Are you shopping from the "home shopping" networks? Do you bank and shop right from the internet? At work is there an us-against-them mentality?

Society also continues to propagate membership according to color, religion, sexual orientation, and other exclusionary characteristics. The more distinct we become -- and by reducing human beings into parts of a group -- the less humane we are.

How else can we explain the level of violence, killings and other horrific behavior unleashed upon others? Being cruel and aggressive is easier when people are seen as objects and/or abstractions. Real life examples of this can be found everywhere.

Studies demonstrate that aggression and other acts of incivility are less likely to occur when people are seen as human beings. Several experiments have proven that subjects are less likely to administer electric shock to people they can see, touch, or know by name.

The antidote to dehumanization is reconnection and appreciation of others -- to see people as human beings and to appreciate diversity and accept the reality we are all linked as a human species. It's time to depart from the us-against-them mentality and the reductionistic thinking that polarizes society. Acts of violence and other inhumane behavior will decrease when we recognize that we are all brothers and sisters.

It will take some time to rehumanize ourselves since the negative conditioning forces have been powerful. Nevertheless, these are signs that we're moving in the right direction. It's not coincidental that people are returning to church, synagogue, and other forms of spirituality. We are looking to reunite with others and searching to renew our sense of morality, values and civility. There appears to be a growing intolerance of the pervasive negativity. I like, for example, that children's television programs are now rated. It's also encouraging to see people bond together after a catastrophic event.

We don't need to wait for catastrophe to move us closer together. Nor do we need to wait for events of religious epiphanies. We have learned, unfortunately, to look externally for answers or cast blame, yet we possess the empathic ability to be human. We just need to look in the right place. It exists in all of us waiting to emerge -- internally.

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Hot flashes focus of new study



■ Three out of four menopausal women in the United States experience hot flashes. But help may be on the way for those who suffer severe and frequent hot flashes in the form of a nationwide study.

If you're a woman approaching menopause -- or you're already there -- you've probably experienced a hot flash or two. Perhaps that's putting it mildly.

Three out of four menopausal women in the United States experience hot flashes, and for some of these women, this common symptom is far more than an occasional annoyance.

Hot flashes, rushes of heat that spread over the body, strike some women several times a day; turning them red, drenching them in sweat and leaving them with chills. These severe and frequent hot flashes interrupt sleep, cause embarrassment

and generally make life miserable.

If you fit this description, you may be eligible to take part in a nationwide study to assess the safety and effectiveness of an investigational treatment for severe and frequent hot flashes. To qualify for this study you must:

■ experience several hot flashes a day

■ be between the ages of 45 and 65

■ have not had a hysterectomy

If selected, participants will be asked for three months either to wear a placebo (no active medica-

tion) skin patch or an investigational hormone replacement skin patch that releases a combination of estrogen and progesterone, a synthetic form of progesterone, into your system.

Participants will be asked to keep six appointments with the doctor conducting the study for tests and monitoring the safety and effectiveness of the patch. These appointments will take place at a local medical center site.

By participating in this study, you may have the opportunity to be treated with one of the newest potential remedies for hot flashes.

Subjects will be monitored by a health care provider who is an expert in hot flashes and the changes related to menopause. Even if you are one of the participants who receives a placebo patch for research purposes, you will still receive free study-related medical treatment, expert medical advice

and financial compensation. All study participants will receive financial compensation intended to cover time and travel expenses. There is no fee for visits with the health care provider or for any study-related medication received.

There are many non-prescription remedies and prescription therapies designed to help manage hot flashes and other changes associated with menopause. You can discuss these with your health care provider.

Meanwhile, women can help themselves feel better by practicing good health and lifestyle habits such as exercising, eating a balanced diet, controlling weight, managing stress and not smoking.

Those interested in more details about the study can call (313) 493-7881.

Potential candidates will be asked several questions in order to determine qualification status.

High cholesterol is war that can be won with some effort

Cholesterol, saturated fat, blood pressure and heart disease.

We hear these words all jumbled together in news reports and health-related articles, but sometimes it can be difficult to understand how they all fit together.

Fancy packaging on some foods makes them look ideal for people watching their weight or their cholesterol. Unfortunately, labels can be deceiving.

For example, shrimp is high in cholesterol, but it contains very little saturated fat. Saturated fat is actually what has the greatest impact on your cholesterol level. On the other hand, you may see a package of cookies labeled "cholesterol-free" but that are high in saturated fat. The cookies are more dangerous to your level of cholesterol than the shrimp.

It's no wonder consumers are confused about this issue. There's one thing that is clear though: There's a definite link between high blood cholesterol levels and heart disease.

Too much cholesterol can clog arteries and cut off the blood supply to the heart, making a leading risk factor for heart disease.

Other risk factors include high blood pressure, smoking, family history of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and being male. If any of these risk factors apply to you, it's a good idea to get a cholesterol test regardless of your age. Men with no other risk factors can wait until age 35 to be tested. Women with no risk factors can wait until age 45. After the first test, people should be tested again by their doctors every five years.

The best tests should include a breakdown of the "good" cholesterol (HDL) which cleanses arteries and the "bad" cholesterol (LDL) which clogs arteries. If your total cholesterol reads 200 or higher and you have two or more of the other risk factors listed, you are considered to be at a high risk for heart disease.

If you are concerned about lowering your blood cholesterol level, there are things you can do about it -- exercise and eating the right foods. Just 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three to four times a week is excellent for weight control and may raise the level of good cholesterol in your bloodstream. Exercise will also

help lower blood pressure and reduce stress.

There are a number of ways of changing your eating habits, as well, to reduce your blood cholesterol. One of the most important changes you can make to your diet is to reduce your intake of saturated fats such as butter, whole milk, cheese, red meat, and certain oils.

■ Avoid foods that contain large amounts of hydro-processed vegetable oils, coconut butter, coconut and palm oils, beef fat, or lard.

■ Trim fat from meats and remove skin from poultry.

■ Avoid nuts, chips and candy as snacks and replace them with pretzels or fruit.

■ Drink skim or low-fat milk instead of whole milk and opt for low-fat or fat-free frozen yogurt over regular ice cream.

It's also important to reduce your cholesterol intake.

■ Avoid all organ meats like liver, brain and kidney.

■ Eat only lean meats and limit these portions to no more than six ounces a day.

■ Avoid commercially prepared cookies, cakes and pies. You're better off baking your own and substituting lower-fat products for the full-fat ingredients.

■ Cook with egg whites instead of whole eggs. Egg yolks have about five grams of fat per yolk and are high in cholesterol.

■ Eat a high-fiber diet. Increase intake of water-soluble fiber such as oat bran, legumes and fruit which may help lower cholesterol levels.

The best oils for your cholesterol are canola and olive oils. These oils consumed in moderation actually lower your LDL levels while leaving the good cholesterol intact.

With some effort you can probably win the war against high cholesterol. So, the next time you make a salad try a dash of olive oil with balsamic vinegar for your dressing. That's for lunch after your fruit-topped cereal!

I read every one of your letters and I love your comments! Please keep writing me with any questions, inspirational stories or suggestions for upcoming articles to: "Talk to the Mirror," Weight Watchers Corporate Communications, P.O. Box 9072, Farmington Hills, MI 48334-2974. For more information on Weight Watchers call 1-888-3FLORINE.

(Florine Mark is an appointee to the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and the Michigan Fitness Foundation.)

HEALTHY LIVING

Epilepsy Foundation

The Epilepsy Center of Michigan has changed its name to the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan. It's an independently incorporated affiliate of the national Epilepsy Foundation.

"The name change aligns us more closely with the national organization and will enhance our strength and visibility," Arlene S. Gorelick, M.P.H., president of the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan, said.

Epilepsy is a disorder of the brain characterized by a tendency to have recurrent seizures. A seizure is caused by an unusually large burst of electrical energy within the brain. Over 90,000 people in Michigan have the disorder.

A toll-free phone line that helps people with epilepsy and their families find the information they need continues to serve more and more people in the state, according to the Foundation.

In the first quarter of 1998, the phone line saw record activity with nearly 800 calls received. The total number of calls for all of 1997 was 2,107.

Those affected by the disease can call the Foundation at 1-800-377-6226. Foundation staff can answer the callers' questions and direct them to the help they need. Written information and a video library are also available.

Established in 1948, the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan is the state's only non-profit organization focusing solely on epilepsy.

The Foundation provides seizure management, employment guidance, advocacy, epilepsy awareness, individual and family support, and information and referral services to people with epilepsy, their families and the general public.

(Healthy Living spotlights Oakland County-related health and medical news and information. To submit items for consideration, write to staff writer Chris Mayer at: Healthy Living, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. Or fax: (248) 644-1314.)

Here are some helpful ways to brush aside cavities

BY DR. DAVID BANDA
SPECIAL WRITER

Question: It seems as though every time I go in for my dental cleaning and checkup, I'm told that I have cavities. Why is that? Am I more cavity-prone than most people. My parents had the same problem. Does this run in families? What can I do to prevent this?

Answer: A frequent diagnosis of dental decay or cavities can be caused by many factors, most of which can be controlled by the patient. There are many misconceptions about cavities, how they form, how we can avoid them and what makes them worse.

The first misconception we need to clear up is the condition referred to as "soft teeth." I frequently hear this in my office as an excuse for enamel. The only legitimate dental condition that can be described in this manner is amelogenesis imperfecta, a very rare condition in which the teeth form without protective enamel resulting in a predilection toward decay among other things. It's unlikely that this is the source of your cavity problem.

The next misconception we need to clear up is what causes cavities. Cavities occur by the combination of several factors.

Three features must be present simultaneously for tooth decay to occur: teeth; bacteria; and food for the bacteria. If we break the cycle by removing

ASK THE DENTIST

one of these from the list we will eliminate the opportunity for decay to form. Which one of these items do we choose to eliminate to stop the tooth decay cycle? Obviously we don't want to remove teeth from this situation because we need these.

Bacteria is not the answer either. We generally perceive bacteria to be bad, as in a bacterial infection. Actually, the presence of bacteria is desirable in the mouth and even necessary for proper function of our body. Bacteria in the mouth begin the complicated process of breaking down foods. The most complex portions of the digestive process occur in the stomach and small intestines, where the most complex molecules, proteins, complex carbohydrates and fat are broken down.

Since the food we eat lingers in the mouth for such a short time compared to the stomach and small intestines, the bacteria that initiates the digestion in the mouth can only act effectively on the simplest forms of food, which are simple sugars and starches. Anything more complex than that has to be more thoroughly broken down further along in our digestive system. It should be clear that in order to break the cycle of decay formation, we cannot eliminate teeth or bacteria from the equation.

This leaves us with the third component -- food for the bacteria.

Simple sugars like sucrose or table sugar are the oral bacteria's favorite food. The bacteria consumes the sugar and gives off a waste product. The waste product of these types of bacteria is acid and acid dissolves teeth, forming cavities.

The only way to break the cycle of tooth decay is to eliminate the food on which the bacteria thrive. This will, in effect, starve the bacteria and reduce the acid waste products that cause tooth decay.

So, instead of saying that sugar causes cavities, it's more accurate to say that bacterial acid waste products cause cavities. And that by feeding the bacteria with simple sugars, we can create more acid and therefore more cavities. This is why your dental health care professionals at your dental office tell you to avoid sugar. A great deal of damage to teeth can be caused by eating a lot of sugar.

Now, back to your questions. We have discussed how cavities form and I'll bet that your sugar intake is too high. There are distinct groups of sugar; sticky sugars as in sugared gum and candy bars; and liquid sugars such as soda pop and sugar in coffee.

Sticky sugar causes cavities on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth, while liquid sugar can cause cavities everywhere but mostly on the front teeth and especially in between and at the gum line. When I notice a frequent decay pattern in front teeth, I can almost guess how many cups of coffee with sugar or how many sodas a person consumes daily.

There are many overlooked sources of sugar, the single most being liquid sugar. Powdered creams for coffee are the biggest surprise to people; these products contain over 50 percent sugar. Corn syrup solids, a form of sugar, is frequently the most abundant ingredient in these products. You can use liquid cream or milk without a problem. Other offenders are cough drops, breath mints and the like. Just because the item may have only a few calories in one piece, it can still be almost 100 percent sugar. Use sugar substitutes whenever possible.

There is a family tendency toward plentiful cavities. Not so much for genetics but from poor diets and bad habits passed down from parent to child. If your parents ate a lot of sugar, you probably will too. The same goes for good oral hygiene at home. There are some simple steps to take to stop the formation of cavities.

1. Reduce sugar intake. Use sugar substitutes whenever you can. Two to

three regular sodas a day will catch up with you. Reducing the sugar in your coffee from two teaspoons to one will not help much because it's still a sugar rinse.

2. Visit your dentist and dental hygienist for cleanings and check-ups.

3. Improve your home care. Ask your dentist and hygienist for specific advice regarding your situation.

4. Use a fluoride mouth rinse or gel to reduce the likelihood of cavities.

5. Have sealants placed on young people's permanent back teeth as soon as they enter the mouth, starting at approximately age 6.

Sealants are an easy-to-apply coating painted on the chewing surfaces of back teeth that help prevent specific types of cavities that often affect children.

If you implement these ideas, you can make your regular dental check-up much easier on yourself and you will greatly reduce the likelihood of hearing yourself say, "What! More cavities? How did that happen?"

(Dr. David Banda is a general dentist in Bloomfield Hills. He graduated from the University of Michigan and is a member of the American Dental Association, the Michigan Dental Association and the Oakland County Dental Society. His "Ask the Dentist" column will appear every other week on the Health & Fitness page. Send questions or comments to Dr. Banda in care of staff writer Chris Mayer at: The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009.)