HEALTH BENEFITS OF WATERMELON

Watermelon isn't just sweet and low in calories, it can prevent high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart attacks and strokes.

In a pilot study, Florida State University researchers gave daily doses of watermelon extract to nine volunteers, all of whom had early-stage hypertension. After only six weeks, all nine had lower blood pressure than when they started.

"We hope to continue research and include a larger group of participants," said professor Arturo Figueroa.

FDA warns against OTC chelation therapy

The FDA has warned eight companies to stop marketing over-the-counter "chelation" sprays, drops and suppositories as a cure for everything from autism to Parkinson's disease.

"This is dangerously misleading – targeting patients and caregivers of patients who have serious conditions with limited treatment options," says the agency's Michael Levy.

These nonprescription products that claim to remove heavy metals from the body can cause dehydration, kidney failure, liver damage and even death.

Affected firms include World Health Products, Hormonal Health, Evenbetternow, Maxam Nutraceutics, Cardio Renew, Artery Health Institute, Longevity Plus and Dr. Rhonda Henry.

FREEZE fat away

In a major advance in the war on flab, the FDA has approved a noninvasive body-contouring treatment that helps fat disappear.

The process uses a gel patch attached to a machine that freezes unwanted fat cells, causing them to self-destruct and reabsorb into the body over several months.

"This is a big deal," enthuses New York plastic surgeon Dr. Lawrence Bass. "It's the first time the FDA has cleared a noninvasive fat-reduction technology."

The procedure, called Zeltiq, is ideal for those who don't need to lose much weight, but have isolated fatty regions such as love handles, abdominal fat and muffin tops.

» NEW « Hepatitis C breakthrough

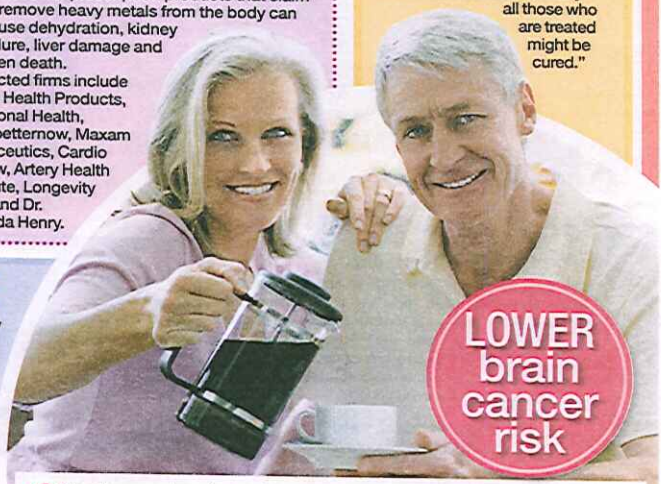
A long-awaited new drug combo is proving to be highly effective in fighting the potentially deadly hepatitis C virus (HCV) – and it is safe and well-tolerated.

Standard treatment requires nearly year-long self-injections of interferon and ribavirin, which has serious side effects and fails in about 30 percent of cases.

The new therapy is a combination of two experimental oral drugs. Treatment time would be about eight to 12 weeks and early testing appears to be nearly 100 percent effective.

A study of 88 hard-to-treat patients living in New Zealand and Australia achieved excellent results.

"We are on the eve of a new era in hepatitis C virus treatment," says Dr. David Thomas, an HCV expert at Johns Hopkins. "In the foreseeable future, nearly all those who are treated might be cured."



LOWER brain cancer risk

Here's a cup of good news: Regular coffee and tea drinkers have a significantly lower risk of a form of brain cancer.

Led by Dominique Michaud from Brown University, scientists analyzed an eight-year nutrition and cancer study that included 410,000 men and women. Those who drank a daily half cup or more of coffee or tea had up to a 34 percent lower risk of malignant glioma, the most common type of brain cancer.