

History You need to Know!

We are all proud descendents of Maharaja Agrasen. Maharaj Agrasen was a Suryavanshi, Kshatriya king deeply venerated by his subjects. His kingdom was an icon of prosperity and his state a model of benevolence. He used to perform all Vedic rituals including Havans and Yagnas, paying his gratitude and obeisance to the learned "Brahmins". Offering animal sacrifice was integral to completion of such Yagnas. Maharaja Agrasen was a keen learner and patron of wisdom expounding Rishis (Researchers). He was open to new ideas and philosophies. As Aristotle has said, "it is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it". Agrasen ji was a paragon of an educated and enlightened mind. He was greatly influenced by the teachings of Sant Mahavir ji, hence over the time he ingratiated non-violence in his daily discourse, adopting vegetarianism, abolishing corporal punishments and animal slaughter. He even saw the core of non-violence as sprouting from the non-violence in thoughts. This philosophy was at cross purposes with the then prevalent practices of animal sacrifice, slavery and consumption of animal products that could come only after killing the animal. This was seen as a potential threat by the then wheelers and dealers and the think tanks. They saw an opportunity in it as an instrument with which they could strip Maharaja Agrasen off his kingdom and riches. The Brahmins of the day enticed him to perform a "Maha Yagna" at completion of which they asked for animal sacrifice. Agrasen Maharaja did not agree to it, to which the rajguru retorted by saying, "Purna Ahuti (the final offering) or Raj (kingdom)". Maharaja lost no time and offered to lay down his kingdom. The gurus were not satisfied even with that and threatened Maharaja with "Dana-pani band" (ex communication from the Hindu society), forcing him to move out and establish the city of "Agroha". The jain gurus offered to adopt Maharaja but, he was convinced of non violence not being antagonistic to the ethos of Vedic philosophy. Maharaja drove his

family to adopt trading as a profession hence to be seen as Vaishya despite being a Kshatriya. Even when living in isolation in his own city of Agroha, the enemies conspired and burnt the city of Agroha. That is when the immigration of Agarwals happened. Mahalakshmi, the goddess of positivity exemplified in her preference of reward for labor (dhan) over laziness, for light over darkness, cleanliness over filth and dedication over convenience, was happy with the conduct of Agarwals during their stay at Agroha, hence blessed them to never abandon them.

Maha Laxmi blessed us in all the eight Avtars. Ashta Lakshmi (Sanskrit: अष्टलक्ष्मी, Astalakshmi, lit. "eight Lakshmis") are a group of eight secondary manifestations of the goddess Lakshmi, who preside over eight sources of wealth and thus represent the powers of Shri-Lakshmi. They are:

- 1) आदि लक्ष्मी Ādi Lakshmi [The First manifestation of Lakshmi]
- 2) धान्य लक्ष्मी Dhānya Lakshmi [Granary wealth]
- 3) धैर्य लक्ष्मी Dhairya Lakshmi [Wealth of courage]
- 4) गज लक्ष्मी Gaja Lakshmi [Elephants, symbols of wealth]
- 5) सन्तान लक्ष्मी Santāna Lakshmi [Wealth of continuity, progeny]
- 6) विजय लक्ष्मी Vijaya Lakshmi [Wealth of victory]
- 7) विद्या लक्ष्मी Vidyā Lakshmi [Wealth of knowledge and education]
- 8) धन लक्ष्मी Dhana Lakshmi [Monetary wealth]

Maharaja Agrasen traveled all over India and married a "nag-kanya" and had 18 children. The 1885 Bombay Presidency Gazetteer maintains that he married 17 nag kanyas. With the blessings of Ashta-Lakshmi, the Agarwals have prospered relentlessly but their persecution never ended. 1911 census of India put our population at 2,718,390. Agarwals were tested again in 1936 when one, Sir Chotu Ram, a

minister in Punjab govt. decreed to cancel all the debts owed to Agarwals and seized all the assets of Agarwals. Thus, ruining them and forcing a further migration. This was even worse than our fate under Mughals who at least recognized our talents. During Mughal rule Lala Todarmal was made the supervisor of the royal mint at Agra. Raja Ranvir Singh was the royal treasurer of Akbar who awarded him with land in Western UP where Lala Ranvir erected the city of Saharanpur. Lala Ratanchand was a diwan of Mughals in 1712 and was given title of a "Raja" but was executed by the new emperor in 1719. Lala Ramji Das Gurwala was a big donor to Bahadur Shah Zafar in 1857 rebellion but was executed by the British. Despite all the hardships, Agarwals have served the society and setup a large number of institutions and business. Late Lala Lajpat Rai, founder of Punjab National Bank, the the Jains (Times of India), are testimony to the same. Sir Gangaram, the founder of modern Lahore and the hospital named after him was even appreciated by the British. Present generation of Agarwals continues to carry the legacy. Lakshmi Mittal (Arcelor-Mittal Steel), Subhash Goyal (Zee Group), Sunil Mittal (Airtel), Naresh Goyal (Jet Airways), the Jindals (Steel Group), Anil Agarwal (Vedanta Group), Rakesh Jhunjhunwala (Stock guru), Dhoots (Videocon group) and many others are examples of the same.

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My Visit to Vaishno Devi: Jai Mata Di!

By Bharat Aggarwal

Our Shastra tell us we should take a pilgrimage at least once a year. Last time, I went to Vaishno Devi was in 1964 when I was a teenager with my two older brothers and a sister, all unmarried at the time. I happen to be on business in Thailand (The Royal Golden Jubilee Ph.D. Program, The Thailand Research Fund, Jomtien Palm Beach Resort, Pattaya, Chonburi, Thailand) and Kuala Lumpur (Putrajaya); and decided to spend few days visiting my family in Batala, a town 20 KM from the Pakistan border. After 45 years, same two brothers and a sister offered to join with me to visit Vaishno Devi, as April is the best time to be in Trikutu mountains, an eternal home of Vaishno Devi.

Story of Vaishno Devi:

Vaishno Devi Mandir is one of the holiest Hindu temples dedicated to Shakti, located in the hill of Vaishno Devi, Jammu and Kashmir, India. In Hinduism, Vaishno Devi, also known as Mata Rani and Vaishnavi, is a manifestation of the Mother Goddess.

The temple is near the town of Katra, in Udhampur district in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is one of the most revered places of worship in Northern India. The shrine is at an altitude of 5200 feet and a distance of approximately 12 kilometres (7.45 miles) from Katra. Million of pilgrims visit the temple every year and is the second most visited religious shrine in India, after Tirumala Venkateswara Temple. The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board maintains the shrine. A rail link from Udhampur to Katra is being built to facilitate pilgrimage. According to Hindu epic, Maa Vaishno Devi took birth in the South of India in the home of Ratnakar Sagar, Her worldly parents had remained childless for a long time. Ratnakar had promised, the night before the birth of the Divine child, that he would not come in the way of whatever his child desired. Ma Vaishno Devi was called Trikuta as a child. Later She was called Vaishnavi because of Her taking birth from Lord Vishnu's lineage. When Trikuta was 9 years old, She sought her father's permission for doing penance on the seashore. Trikuta prayed to Lord Vishnu in the form of Rama. During Shree Rama's search for Sita, He reached the seashore along with His army. His eyes fell on this Divine Girl in deep meditation. Trikuta told Shree Rama that She had accepted Him as

Her husband. Shree Rama told Her that during this Incarnation He had vowed to be faithful to only Sita. However the Lord assured Her that in Kaliyuga He would manifest as Kalki and would marry Her.

In the meantime Shree Rama asked Trikuta to meditate in the cave found in the Trikuta Range of Manik Mountains, situated in Northern India. Ma decided to observe the 'Navratra' for the Victory of Shree Rama against Ravan. Hence one reads the Ramayana during the 9 days of Navratra, in remembrance of the above connection. Shree Rama promised that the whole world would sing Ma Vaishno Devi's praise. Trikuta was to become famous as Vaishno Devi and would become immortal forever.[1]

With the passage of time many more stories about the Mother Goddess emerged. One such story is about Shree-Dhar.

Shree-Dhar was an ardent devotee of Ma Vaishno Devi. He resided in a village called Hansali, 2 km away from the present Katra town. Once Ma appeared to him in the form of a young bewitching girl. The young girl asked the humble Pandit to hold a 'Bhandara'. (A feast to feed the mendicants and devotees) The Pandit set out to invite people from the village and near-by places. He also invited 'Bhairav Nath' a selfish demon. Bhairav Nath asked Shri-Dhar how he was planning to fulfill the requirements. He reminded him of the bad consequences in case of failure. As Panditji was lost in worry, the Divine girl appeared and told Him not to be despondent as everything had been arranged. She asked that over 360 devotees be seated in the small hut. True to Her word the Bhandara went smoothly with food and place to spare. Bhairav Nath admitted that the girl had supernatural powers and decided to test Her further. He followed the Divine girl to Trikuta Hills. For 9 months Bhairav Nath was searching for the mystic girl in the mountains, whom he believed was an incarnation of the Mother Goddess. While running away from Bhairav, Devi shot an arrow into the Earth from which water gushed out. The resultant river is known as Baanganga. It is believed that by taking a bath in Baanganga (Baan: Arrow), a believer of the Mother Goddess can wash away all his sins. The banks of the river, known as Charan Paduka, are marked by Devi's foot

imprints, which remains intact till date. Vaishno Devi then took shelter in a cave known as Garbh Joon near Adhkawari where she meditated for 9 months attaining spiritual wisdom and powers. Her meditation was cut short when Bhairav located her. Vaishno Devi was then compelled to take the form of Maha Kali when Bhairav tried to kill her. The manifestation of the Mother Goddess took place at the mouth of the Holy cave at Darbar. The Goddess then beheaded Bhairav with such sheer force, that his skull fell at a place known as Bhairav Ghati, 2.5 km from the Holy Cave. The severed head of Bhairav fell at a distant hilltop. In his dying moments, Bhairav begged and received divine forgiveness from the goddess. Today, it is believed that the Yatra is not complete unless the pilgrim has been to Bhairon ka Mandir (2.6 km from the main sanctum) as well, after the darshan of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi.

In his dying moments, Bhairav pleaded for forgiveness. The Goddess knew that Bhairav's main intention in attacking her was to achieve salvation. She not only granted Bhairav liberation from the cycle of reincarnation, but also granted him a boon, whereby every devotee, in order to ensure completion of the pilgrimage, had to visit Bhairav Nath's temple near the Holy cave after the darshan of the Goddess. Meanwhile Vaishno Devi assumed the **shape of a rock with three pindis (heads) and immersed herself into meditation forever.**

Meanwhile Pandit Shree-Dhar became impatient. He started to march towards Trikuta Mountain on the same path that he had witnessed in a dream. He ultimately reached the cave mouth. He made a daily routine of worshipping the 'Pindis' in several ways. His worship pleased the Goddess. She appeared in front of him and blessed him. Since that day, Shree-Dhar and his descendants have been worshipping the Goddess Mother Vaishno Devi.[2]

My Journey: We took a Shatabdi Express from Delhi at 7:00 AM which reached Amritsar at 1:00 PM and from there drove to Batala. After resting overnight, we took a bus to Jammu which took about 4 hours (180 kilometers). We reached Jammu around 2 PM, took our lunch at Chole-Bathura restaurant, visited the famous Raghunath Ji temple

and then continued our journey to Katra which is about 45 kilometers away, located at 2300 feet elevation and took around 2 hours. We reached Katra at around 6 PM, and checked into a hotel Continental (Rs 2200/night). This hotel was quite neat and clean and had a fairly good service. We rested that evening, had our dinner and charged our battery. Next day we took our bath, wore brand new unused clothes and got ready at around 7 AM for our Journey to see Vaishno Devi located on a mountain at around 6000 feet elevation. We took a helicopter from Katra (Pawan Helicopter; Rs 2300 round trip) that took us about two hours to get on it (due to formality and long lines) but only 2 minutes to reach as close as possible to Vaishni Devi (12 kilometers from Katra). From there, it was about 5 KM walk to the door of Vaishno Devi and was provided a special line for helicopter users. We then finally had a chance to pay tribute to Vaisno Devi represented by three pindis that includes Lakshmi-Kali-Sarwati.

From the temple, it was about 90 min walk back to the helicopter pad mostly uphill but was pleasant. We were now supposed to visit Bhairv temple which is further uphill, a couple of kilometers away but our gas ran out to continue. Thus we took a helicopter, came back to Katra at around 1 PM, had our lunch in the hotel, left at around 4 PM and reached home in Batala at around 9 PM. It was a great historical trip for all of us.

Wish all of you "Jai Mata Di".

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What is that Red dot?

By Uma Aggarwal

If you have lived in USA for a while or are born here and of Indian decent, I am sure someone has asked you that question some time in your life. May be because that red dot, which is called "bindi" in India, is the most visually fascinating of all forms of body decorations. I was asked that many times also, and usually I would reply like many of us would say "Oh! It is a symbol of marriage in India, but now a days it is a fashion statement, and you don't have to be married to put that anymore." This is not an incorrect statement, but there is lot more to that red dot than meets the eye. I found out about it when I decided to dive deep into the subject. Let us explore what are the hidden reasons, and meaning

behind this very obvious and visual cultural tradition from India.

Bindi came from the Sanskrit word "Bindu" which could mean a "dot" or "a drop" or a "small particle". I think the meaning "a dot" seems more appropriate here. Let us check out what bindi is called in different languages:

Tikli in Marathi

Pottu in Tamil and Malayalam

Tilak in Hindi

Chandlo in Guajrati

Bottu or Tilakam in Telegu

Bottu or Tilaka in Kannada

Teep in Bengali

Sometimes the term sindoor, kumkum or kasturi are used by reference to the material used to make the mark. Men also put it on the forehead and when worn by men it is called 'Tilak' (mark). Men wear it on auspicious occasions such as Puja (ritual worship), or marriage, or Arati (waving of lights) on festive occasions or while embarking on, or upon return from a voyage or a campaign.

In addition to the bindi, in India, a vermilion mark (Sindoor) in the parting of the hair just above the forehead is worn by married women as a symbol of their married status. During North Indian marriage ceremonies, the groom applies sindoor on the parting in the bride's hair, declaring to the world she is under his protection from now onwards.

That brings us to the next point. What is bindi made of traditionally, and how it is supposed to be applied?

Traditional bindi is red or maroon in color. A pinch of vermilion powder applied skillfully with practiced fingertip make the perfect red dot or you can use small circular discs or hollow pie coin as aid. If you want to put it just like they used to in olden days, than first apply a sticky wax paste on the empty space in the disc than cover it with kumkum or vermilion and then remove the disc to get a perfect round bindi. Mainly the material used to put traditional bindi is turmeric, even though turmeric is rich yellow color, but when it is mixed with lime it turns into beautiful deep red. Other traditional material used were 'Sandal', 'aguru', 'kasturi', and 'sindoor' (made of zinc oxide and dye). Even Saffron ground together with 'kusumba'

flower was used sometimes. Nowadays it is a different story all together. Firstly bindi comes in every shape color and size, and it has all kinds of intricate designs depending upon the occasion you want to put it for. And as you already know, this is self adhesive bindi you can call it sticker bindi. Not many people mess with various powder version of it, but the ones you can put on and off quickly. After all, we are short of time in the modern world. Fancier sticker bindi are decorated with sequins, glass beads, or rhinestones. It is obvious by changing the tradition we have lost some of the benefits, because some of the material used earlier were healing herbs like Turmeric or sandalwood.

Now the next question is why the bindi is adorned between the eyebrows. Well, nothing is our tradition is done without a reason.

The area between the eyebrows is the sixth chakra known as the 'agna' meaning 'command' in the yogic tradition. It is the seat of concealed wisdom. It is the centre point wherein all experience is gathered in total concentration. According to the tantric tradition, when during meditation the latent energy 'kundalini' rises from the base of the spine towards the head, this 'agna' is the probable outlet for this potent energy. The red 'kumkum' between the eyebrows is said to retain energy in the human body and control the various levels of concentration. It is also the central point of the base of the creation itself, symbolizing auspiciousness and good fortune. It is also suppose to protect against demons and bad luck. Scientifically, the pineal gland is also at the same spot. The pineal gland has an eye like structure and it functions as a light receptor. It appears to play major role in, metabolism sleep patterns etc. The pineal gland secretes melanin during times of relaxation and visualization and reacts to electromagnetic energy. When activated, the pineal gland becomes the line of communication with the higher planes. Putting a bindi is like decorating the pineal gland in style, besides stimulating it in the positive way.

So next time someone asks you, "What is that red dot?" You can give them a good lesson on one of our ancient and meaningful traditions!

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INDIA HOUSE / O.P.JINDAL CENTRE ACTIVITIES UPDATE- JAN/FEB 2009

India House, located at 8888 West Belfort, Houston, TX 77031 and phone # 713-929-1900 is pleased to inform the public on various events and programs held in Jan/Feb 2009.

EVENTS:

1. VISHWA HINDI DIVAS was celebrated on Jan 3 in recognition of Hindi's emergence on world stage. All Indo-American organizations got together and almost all participants spoke with pride in Hindi. India's Consul General Sanjiv Arora was the keynote speaker and visiting Indian parliament member Najma Heptulla was the chief guest.
2. COMMUNITY LUNCHEON was held to bring together agencies to identify future community needs in the SouthWest Houston area. This luncheon was hosted by Brays Oak Management District on Jan 30.
3. MAHATMA GANDHI MEMORIAL day was held on Jan 31. The event was organized by Mahatma Gandhi Library in collaboration with India CultureCentre, India House, Unity Peacemakers, Gujarati Sahitya Sarita and other organizations.
Consul General of India was the chief guest and he said that Gandhi's teachings of Ahimsa or non-violence had influenced great people around the world.
4. GOV. PERRY RECEPTION was held on Feb 5. The event was hosted by India House and was the first time a Texas Governor has come

to an Indo American Community Event in Houston. Gov. Perry lauded the impressive contributions of Indo Americans to the state. India's Consul General Sanjiv Arora commended the efforts of India House officials to offer various facilities to the community. Harris County Judge Ed Emmett praised the efforts that India House and other organizations have made to serve the community, especially during the aftermath of Hurricane Ike.

5. AL GREEN FORUM was held on Feb 8. U.S Rep Al Green (D-9TH Dist of Texas) met with a group of Indo Americans in preparation of his visit to India. The meeting was organized by the Indo-American Political Action Committee to appraise Green of the concerns and hopes of Indian Americans in light of the recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India.
6. INTERFAITH EVENING OF PEACE was held on Feb 13. This event was hosted by Shirdi Sai Jalaram Temple and had representatives from many faiths under one roof. Jolanda Jones, City Council for At-Large Position 5 spoke of what human life can be through peace and education. The keynote speaker was Dr.Santosh Tandon of Universal Brotherhood from California.

PROGRAMS AT INDIA HOUSE:

1. CHARITY MEDICAL CLINIC: Open every Saturday from 9am-1pm for non-emergency care. A

Well Woman's Clinic will start in March and detailed check up will be available by experienced and seasoned Gynecologists from the Medical Staff of Women's Hospital of Texas. Testing Services for infectious diseases and sexually transmitted diseases will be available on a limited basis shortly.

2. YOGA CLASSES: Runs every Thursday and Saturday between 11-12 noon.

Meditation, relaxation, channeling and stretching exercises are taught by 3 renowned Yoga Instructors of Houston. The program is currently offered FREE.

3. GITA CLASSES: Runs every Thursday for women between 12-1pm. This is offered FREE.
4. BANGLA LANGUAGE CLASSES: Runs every Sunday between 10-1pm. The program is FREE and currently has 25 students on a regular basis.
5. BOLLYWOOD DANCE CLASSES: Runs on Thursdays from 7-8pm and Sundays from 10.30-1.30 pm. The classes are offered for various age groups of Kids, juniors and Adults.
6. CRICKET: Taped Ball Cricket is played every Sunday at India House grounds.

PARTIES AND FUNCTIONS:

India House banquet halls were the venue for various private parties and functions throughout Jan and Feb 2009.

Living with Cancer: Eight Things You Need to Know

Editor's Note: This story is part of our feature "Living With Cancer: Lessons and Advice from Kris Carr" which was originally printed in the Special Report "New Answers for Cancer" from Scientific American.

Rather than surrendering to despair and impersonal medical treatments, growing numbers of cancer patients are empowering themselves with information and control over their therapies. The trend is finding acceptance in mainstream medicine and helping people with cancer lead healthier lives.

The experiences of a author and filmmaker Kris Carr, who was diagnosed with a rare, incurable malignancy, illustrate

how successfully one can manage cancer as a chronic disease.

The following resource guides offer tips on developing a strategy for managing the illness, asking the right questions of physicians and getting the right professional and personal support.

1. You Have Cancer: Now What?

Diagnosis: cancer. Your head is spinning, and you feel like the wind has been sucked out of you. In a split second, life as you knew it is gone. "Getting diagnosed throws your entire universe into a free fall," Carr writes in her 2007 book *Crazy Sexy Cancer Tips*. "There's no sugarcoating it: cancer is a devastating blow, one that takes time to process."

The first things you should do (after taking a deep breath and trying to chill):

* Find the best doctor for your disease: Be willing to travel and always get second, third and even fourth opinions to make sure that you're getting the best treatment.

* Design a healing plan: Pull together a team of Western physicians as well as integrative doctors (to teach you how to build up your immunity and spiritual grit) to create the best get-healthy recipe. Ask family and friends to chip in and scour the Internet and bookshelves for information. "If you want to heal, you have to take initiative, have a voice and use it," Carr says.

* Focus on lifestyle changes: "The only thing that you can control is what you eat, what you drink and how you move," Carr says. She recommends exploring healthy diets, exercise and alternative therapies such as massage, yoga and meditation to boost and maintain your physical and emotional well-being.

* Create a support system: "Nobody understands you quite like another cancer survivor," Carr says. "There is incredible strength in that."

* Live! "Don't wait for permission to live. Just because you have cancer does not mean that your life is over," Carr insists. "Start living. It's that simple."

2. Questions to Ask

Studies show that cancer (and other) patients who arm themselves with information typically fare better and experience fewer side effects than those who simply follow doctors' orders, no questions asked. Being informed gives them some control over their disease—and that feeling of empowerment plays a role in the healing process. No. 1 rule: do not be cowed by your doctor. Ask him or her to explain anything and everything you don't understand. Prepare questions in advance of appointments (to reduce stress and the odds of forgetting any)—and bring a notebook to jot down answers and other important info. Below are some questions you should ask:

- * What causes this type of cancer?
- * What are the risk factors? If it's genetic, are other family members at risk?
- * What lifestyle changes (diet, exercise, rest) do you recommend?
- * What are my treatment options?
- * Are there activities that should be avoided because they might trigger or exacerbate symptoms?
- * What happens if new symptoms crop up or existing ones worsen?
- * What medical tests or procedures are necessary? How often?
- * What stage is my cancer? What does that mean?
- * What is my overall prognosis or chance of recovery?
- * What are the average survival and cure rates?
 - * Could my disease go into remission?
 - * What is the recommended treatment?

* How often will I have to undergo treatment—and for how long?

* What are the potential side effects?

* What are the benefits versus the risks of each treatment option?

* Are there alternative therapies? What are they?

* What are the expected results of treatment?

* Is the treatment painful? If so, is there a way to make it more bearable?

* How long is the recovery? Will it require a hospital stay?

* When can I resume my normal activity (if it's been curtailed)?

* Has my cancer spread? If so, how does this change treatment decisions?

* Am I eligible for any clinical trials?

* What happens if my disease progresses while I'm in a clinical trial?

* Who foots the bills if I participate in a clinical trial?

* Where can I find emotional, psychological and spiritual support?

* Whom should I call with questions or concerns after office hours?

* May I contact you or a nurse if I have questions or more symptoms? (If the

answer is "no," find another doctor.)

3. Your Odds of Beating Cancer

Success in the battle against cancer is often measured in terms of the "five-year relative survival rate." That rate is the number of patients who are still alive five years after being diagnosed, relative to the number who would be expected to survive if they had not come down with the disease. Five years might not seem like a lot, but it is, considering that 67 is the median age for diagnosis.

4. Getting Support: Tips, Tools and Tenderness

You've just been diagnosed with cancer. Now what? First and foremost, do not try to handle this on your own. Allow family and friends to help, and find others in your situation to lean on. Online resources:

* www.crazysexycancer.com: Carr's Web site. Have questions? Want to dish? You can visit her online community, www.crazysexylife.com.

* <http://berniesiegelmd.com> and www.ecap-online.org: These sites of physician Bernie Siegel, author of *Love, Medicine & Miracles and Peace, Love & Healing* (both from Harper

Paperbacks, 1990), offer info and tools based on the science of mind-body-spirit medicine.

* www.cancercare.org: Need a professional cancer assistant? Try the next best thing. This site is designed to help patients navigate their way through cancer—answering questions, finding help or just "listening" when they need to vent.

* <http://nccam.nih.gov>: The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine of the National Institutes of Health provides information here on alternative and complementary therapies, discoveries and clinical trials.

* <http://hippocrateshealthinstitute.com>: Site of the Hippocrates Health Institute, a world-renowned healing center in Florida.

* www.mercola.com: An alternative medicine and education site.

* www.heardsupport.org: This site is specifically geared toward patients with hemangioendothelioma, the rare cancer that Carr has.

* www.livestrong.org: Site of seven-time Tour de France winner and cancer survivor Lance Armstrong.

* www.ulmanfund.org: Provides support programs and resources for patients and their families. Also helpful: a downloadable book penned by founders Doug and Diana Ulman.

* www.thechinastudy.com: The China Study, by T. Colin Campbell, probes the relationship between diet and cancer and other diseases.

* www.cancer.gov: This site of the National Cancer Institute is a comprehensive source of state-of-the-art treatments and clinical trials (including a database of open trials).

* www.imtooyoungforthis.org: An invaluable source of support and research for survivors in their 20s and 30s and their families.

* www.cancersurvivorsunite.org: Camps and support programs for young adults with cancer.

* www.youngcancerspouses.org: A site designed to connect couples dealing with the ups and downs of cancer.

* www.cancerconsultants.com: Contains detailed, consumer-friendly information on the latest treatment developments.

* www.americancancersociety.com: This American Cancer Society site provides basic information, alternative

therapies, ways to manage the disease, and support programs .

* www.oncolink.com: This University of Pennsylvania site offers key cancer info and pointers.

* www.cancerguide.org: A how-to on researching your disease, searching for clinical trials, and finding out about the latest traditional and alternative therapies.

* www.cancer.net: American Society of Clinical Oncology site provides oncologist-approved information to help patients make informed decisions about their health care.

* www.gildasclub.org: Named for Saturday Night Live comedian Gilda Radner, who died of ovarian cancer, this site provides a support network for patients and their families.

* www.thewellnesscommunity.org: The Wellness Community provides support and education for cancer patients and caretakers—and hooks them up with others going through the same thing. It provides info on local wellness communities and even offers a virtual wellness community in Spanish.

5. Medical Resources

Finding a doctor who specializes in cancer care and choosing a treatment facility are essential steps in any patient's recovery program. One good place to start is with the 63 cancer centers that the National Cancer Institute recognizes for "scientific excellence and the capability to integrate a diversity of research approaches" (http://cancercenters.cancer.gov/cancer_centers).

You can also check whether the American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer (www.facs.org/cancerprogram) approves of a given program. Some of the things to look for in a cancer center include a low mortality index, a high ratio of nurses to patients and opportunities to participate in clinical trials. For more tips, see www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Therapy/doctor-facility.

6. The 411 on Health Insurance

Worried that your health insurance won't cover your treatment? Wondering if you're entitled to disability benefits? These Web sites may help:

www.healthinsuranceinfo.net

www.patientadvocate.org

www.patient.cancerconsultants.com

<http://cancerguide.org/disability.html>

www.thedisabilityexpert.com

www.ssa.gov/applyfordisability

7. How to Stay Healthy

Patients undergoing treatment can shore up their physical (and emotional) reserves by eating well, exercising and cutting stress (which impairs the immune system). The American Institute for Cancer Research, which funds studies on the role of food and exercise in cancer prevention and treatment, recommends a diet that's at least two-thirds vegetables, fruit, whole grains and beans. Below is a roundup of research related to staying healthy:

* A study of 22,000 healthy Greeks showed their "Mediterranean diet," rich in vegetables, whole grains, olive oil, fruit and fish, reduced their risk of dying from cancer by at least 25 percent. Other studies have found that nutrients in dark, leafy greens may inhibit the growth of tumor cells in breast, skin, lung and stomach cancers and that green tea may thwart cancer development in colon, liver, breast and prostate cells. (A leading theory: flavonoids in tea and carotenoids in leafy greens, which act as antioxidants, may protect against cancer by rooting out free radicals.)

* A pair of 2006 studies showed that regular exercise reduced by up to 61 percent the odds of death in colorectal cancer patients. The findings held even in patients who did not start exercising until after diagnosis.

* A 2005 study showed that 92 percent of nearly 3,000 women with breast cancer who walked or did other exercise three to five hours weekly were still alive 10 years after their diagnosis, compared with 86 percent of those who exercised less than an hour a week.

* A 30-year review of the scientific literature, published in 2004, suggested that cancer patients who feel helpless or who suppress negative emotions may be at greater risk of having their cancer spread than those who play a role in their healing.

8. Looking Ahead: Start a Family?

Does a cancer diagnosis spell the end of your dreams to have a family? In a word—no. Note to readers: check your options before undertaking treatments that may cause infertility. In the event that you cannot become pregnant, there is always surrogacy

and adoption. Despite what you've heard, it is possible to adopt if you've had cancer. The key: pick an agency and country that are open to working with cancer survivors.

For more, check out:

* www.fertilehope.org: This site provides unvarnished facts about fertility risks associated with cancer treatment as well as fertility-preservation and parenthood alternatives before, during and after treatment. It outlines the success rates, costs and time requirements for a variety of fertility procedures and also addresses other possibilities, including egg and sperm donation, surrogacy and adoption.

* www.pregnantwithcancer.org: This Web site links newly pregnant cancer patients with others with a similar cancer who have already been there, done that.

Cancer Facts

- Bernardino Ramazzini (Italian Physician) noted in 1700 that breast cancer was more prevalent in nuns; do you know why?
- Almost 80% of total calories in developing countries come from cereals and grains (complex carbohydrates) but in developed countries from fats derived from meat and vegetable oil; and sugar.
- Why Eskimos, who derive 60% of their calories from fat, have very low incidence of cancer (especially breast) and heart attack?
- Did you know Americans spend \$200 billions every year on cancer care?
- The median age for diagnosis of cancer in Americans is 67 and five-year survival for prostate cancer is 99%.

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Do Cholesterol Drugs Do Any Good?

Cover Story January 17, 2008, 10:00AM EST

Research suggests that, except among high-risk heart patients, the benefits of statins such as Lipitor are overstated by John Carey

Martin Winn's cholesterol level was inching up. Cycling up hills, he felt chest pain that might have been angina. So he and his doctor decided he should be on a cholesterol-lowering medication called a statin. He was in good company. Such drugs are the best-selling medicines in history, used by more than 13 million Americans and an additional 12 million patients around the world, producing \$27.8 billion in sales in 2006. Half of that went to Pfizer for its leading statin, Lipitor. Statins certainly performed as they should for Winn, dropping his cholesterol level by 20%. "I assumed I'd get a longer life," says the retired machinist in Vancouver, B.C., now 71. But here the story takes a twist. Winn's doctor, James M. Wright, is no ordinary family physician. A professor at the University of British Columbia, he is also director of the government-funded Therapeutics Initiative, whose purpose is to pore over the data on particular drugs and figure out how well they work. Just as Winn started on his treatment, Wright's team was analyzing evidence from years

of trials with statins and not liking what it found. Yes, Wright saw, the drugs can be life-saving in patients who already have suffered heart attacks, somewhat reducing the chances of a recurrence that could lead to an early death. But Wright had a surprise when he looked at the data for the majority of patients, like Winn, who don't have heart disease. He found no benefit in people over the age of 65, no matter how much their cholesterol declines, and no benefit in women of any age. He did see a small reduction in the number of heart attacks for middle-aged men taking statins in clinical trials. But even for these men, there was no overall reduction in total deaths or illnesses requiring hospitalization—despite big reductions in "bad" cholesterol. "Most people are taking something with no chance of benefit and a risk of harm," says Wright. Based on the evidence, and the fact that Winn didn't actually have angina, Wright changed his mind about treating him with statins—and Winn, too, was persuaded. "Because there's no apparent benefit," he says, "I don't take them anymore." Wait a minute. Americans are bombarded with the message from doctors, companies, and the media that high levels of bad cholesterol

are the ticket to an early grave and must be brought down. Statins, the message continues, are the most potent weapons in that struggle. The drugs are thought to be so essential that, according to the official government guidelines from the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP), 40 million Americans should be taking them. Some researchers have even suggested—half-jokingly—that the medications should be put in the water supply, like fluoride for teeth. Statins are sold by Merck (Mevacor and Zocor), AstraZeneca (Crestor), and Bristol-Myers Squibb (Pravachol) in addition to Pfizer. And it's almost impossible to avoid reminders from the industry that the drugs are vital. A current TV and newspaper campaign by Pfizer, for instance, stars artificial heart inventor and Lipitor user Dr. Robert Jarvik. The printed ad proclaims that "Lipitor reduces the risk of heart attack by 36%...in patients with multiple risk factors for heart disease."

So how can anyone question the benefits of such a drug?

http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/08_04/b4068052092994.htm

"...Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah ..." (Protect your Dharma and It will protect you)