

Health & Fitness

Your Health

Traffic jam

Sitting in traffic is tough on the nerves. It could also be hard on the heart. Researchers interviewed nearly 1,500 heart attack survivors living in the region of Germany around Augsburg. They were asked about what they'd been doing in the four days before their heart attacks.



About 8 percent said they'd been stuck in traffic a few hours before the attack. The lingering effect of traffic seemed to be worse in women and those with the chest pain known as angina.

What could be the connection between traffic and heart attacks? Anger and stress have been linked to spasms of coronary arteries, the sudden disruption of cholesterol-filled plaque and the initiation of unstable heart rhythms, any of which can trigger a heart attack. Air pollution is another possible culprit.

Eye on triglycerides

High triglycerides often take a back seat to a high level of harmful LDL cholesterol and a low level of protective HDL, but they are worth paying attention to on their own.

Fatty foods, rapidly digested carbohydrates, excess weight and some medications can boost triglycerides, the main fat-carrying particle in the bloodstream. You can keep them in check by cutting back on easily digested carbohydrates like white bread and mashed potatoes and eating more whole grains. Saturated and trans fats boost triglycerides, while unsaturated fats can lower them.

Eating fatty fish twice a week can help, as can exercise and losing weight if you're overweight.

Prevention pill?

Back in 2003, two British researchers suggested a simple approach to preventing heart disease: have everyone over age 50 take a daily "polypill" that contained three blood pressure-lowering drugs (an ACE inhibitor, a beta blocker and a diuretic), a statin for cholesterol, aspirin to prevent blood clots that lead to heart attacks and most strokes, and the vitamin folic acid. Containing low doses of widely used generic drugs, the pill would be safe and cheap.

Indian researchers set about testing it. They recruited more than 2,400 men and women without heart disease between the ages of 45 and 80 years. Some took a polypill they called the Polycap containing three beta blockers, a statin and aspirin. Others took a pill with one or more of the ingredients. After three months, the polypill had lowered systolic blood pressure (the top number of a blood pressure reading) a respectable seven points and harmful LDL by 12 points. The polypill didn't cause any more problems than pills containing just one or two of the ingredients.

In May, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration took a step toward a polypill by approving Exforge HCT for blood pressure control. It contains amlodipine, a calcium-channel blocker; valsartan, an angiotensin-receptor blocker; and hydrochlorothiazide, a diuretic.

— Harvard Heart Letter

Hidden danger

More college athletes to get tested for the potentially deadly sickle cell trait — Page 2

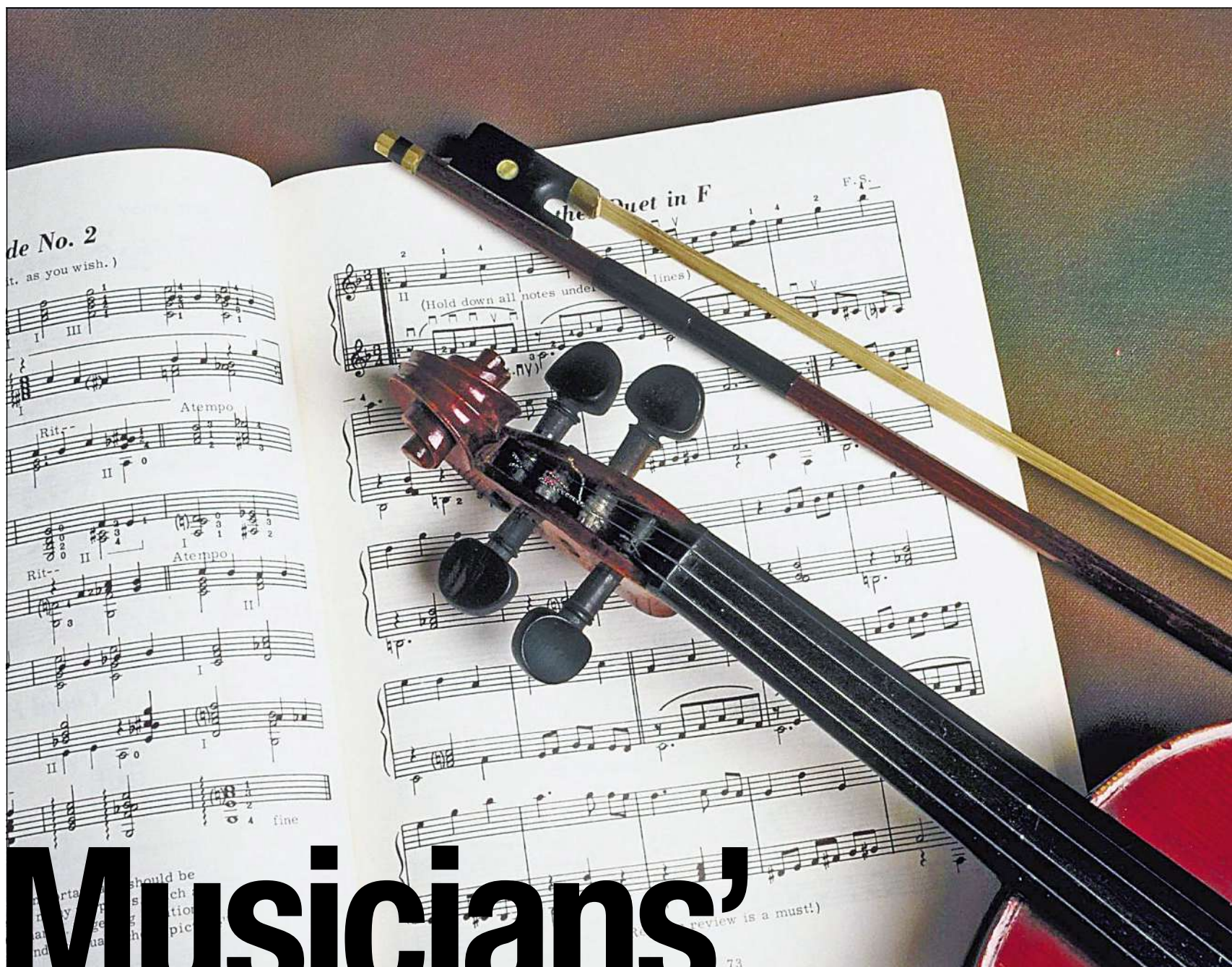
Fighting compulsion

Natural compound may combat impulse to pull out hair — Dr. Massey, Page 4

Body basics

Many health sources say hot flashes during menopause happen for six months to two years, but a 13-year study of 438 women showed hot flashes persist for more than five years on average.

Source: The Journal Menopause



Musicians' low note

For some, fear of injury greater than stage fright

BY EDWARD ORTIZ
Sacramento Bee

Fora musician, there is a terror greater than stage fright: a music injury.

As with athletes, musicians' bodies are pushed to the limit through hours of practice and intense bursts during performances. And often, the result is the onset of a repetitive stress injury or similar ailment.

But you won't find many musicians admitting that they have tendonitis or carpal tunnel syndrome. There's just too much competition for too few gigs, and a music injury is like a dark stain on a musician's bright career.

As a result, the incidence of music injuries has yet to be adequately

established. A recent joint study by the Texas Center of Music and Medicine at the University of North Texas and the Performing Arts Medical Association concluded that nearly 65 percent of the music-student population in the United States has dealt with some kind of repetitive stress or motion injury.

"These are hidden, tip-of-the-iceberg type numbers," said Dr. Robert Markison, a hand surgeon and clinical professor of surgery at the University of California, San Francisco. He is the co-founder of the health program for performing artists at the school.

Markison, who is also a longtime brass player, has, at any one time, 10 to 15 patients with music-related injuries in his San Francisco practice.

He considers himself



Repetition of fingerings can cause carpal tunnel syndrome over time.



Repetitive hand and wrist motions of playing the piano can cause pain on the inside of the wrist and forearm.

Inside:

- How to avoid getting hurt
- Common injuries among musicians

injuries during a 2007 address to the incoming class of medical students at Stanford University.

The majority of his music-injury patients are classical musicians.

"It's because they have to reproduce such a large volume of near-perfect musical material," he said.

Markison's patients range from a 7-year-old

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Fibroid removal could prevent unnecessary hysterectomies

BY ROBERT MCCOPPIN
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When Sherry Nicklaus was diagnosed with uterine fibroids, her doctor had one recommendation: remove her uterus.

Nicklaus recoiled at the idea of having major surgery to cut out an organ of her body. Her doctor didn't discuss alternatives, but tried to tempt her by saying, "I'll make you go down two dress sizes."

Nicklaus was livid. As a former pharmaceutical saleswoman, she knew doctors are required to tell patients about all reasonable alternatives for treatment.

"I remember leaving terrified and upset," she said. "I knew the fibroids weren't life-threatening, they were benign, but they're annoying."

Eventually, Nicklaus, 46, of Geneva, found Dr. Jonathan Song at Delnor Hospital in St. Charles. He offered her a less invasive option: laparoscopic myomectomy. He uses two or three half-inch incisions to insert surgical instruments and a tiny camera to cut out just the fibroids or myomas.

Like most of Song's patients, Nicklaus was out of the hospital that day, and back to normal in two days — much faster than a hysterectomy, which typically takes several days in the hospital and a month or two of recovery.

At some point in their lives, 70 percent to 80 percent of women will have

"I think we're doing too many unnecessary hysterectomies because not enough doctors can do other procedures."

Dr. Jonathan Song

fibroids, though only some of them will ever have symptoms like excessive menstrual bleeding and pelvic pain or pressure.

Each year, about 600,000 women in the United States have hysterectomies, which can deplete the body's hormones and cause depression and other side effects.

One-third to a half of hysterectomies are for fibroids, according to the National Uterine Fibroids Foundation.

Song believes minimally invasive fibroid removal could prevent unnecessary hysterectomies for fibroids. He uses an innovative technique, which cuts the fibroids into smaller pieces so

they can be removed. After some initial resistance, the procedure is gaining wider acceptance among doctors.

This year, the American College of Obstetrics & Gynecology awarded first prize to Song and Drs. Carlos Rotman and Edgardo Yordan of the Oak Brook Institute of Endoscopy for their medical video of their procedure.

The patient in the video was able to recover to have a child and got pregnant again this year.

Some doctors reserve fibroid removal as a way to save the uterus for women who want to have children, or for those with only a single small fibroid.

But Song believes all women, even those after menopause and those with numerous large fibroids, should have the option of avoiding hysterectomy.

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