



ask Jason

Dr. Jason Karlawish deals with medical issues facing you and your loved ones

Why it's a good idea to test for osteoporosis, getting to the bottom of that third martini, and keeping the big chill out of fingers and toes.

Q As soon as the weather starts cooling down, my hands and feet get cold! I'm in pretty good shape because I cycle and run three or four times a week, but I am an ex-smoker (I quit 20 years ago). I'm 61. Is this problem likely to get worse as I get older?

Jen P., Schaumburg, Illinois

A If your hands and feet become painfully cold on a regular basis, it's possible the cause is a disorder of the thyroid or hormone system. It could even be a problem with your blood or connective tissue. It's worth checking with a doctor, but don't worry; what's more likely is that as we get older, we simply become less tolerant to cold. The thinking behind this relates to the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which controls all our organs and muscles, adjusting blood flow in order to moderate the body's temperature. The ANS gets a little less frisky over time and this sluggishness means blood doesn't move around as efficiently as it used to, and we feel the chill much more than we once did. The solution? It's tried and trusted: better protective clothing. Don't forget your gloves!

Q My grandmother on my dad's side may have had osteoporosis, as she had a really noticeable widow's hump when she was in her 70s. I've read that osteoporosis runs in families. I'm 57 and I eat a balanced diet, but I've never done any real exercise. Should I worry?

Julie M., Nashville, Tennessee

A You're right in thinking that osteoporosis, the bone-thinning disease, can run in families, and



there's definitely a genetic component as it is more common in slender white women, especially if they have been smokers. Around the time of menopause, all women should get a bone mineral density test. This is a quick, non-invasive and painless procedure, and will indicate whether drug treatment is warranted. If the test shows that you have only the beginnings of bone loss, you can make alterations to your diet and lifestyle right away. These include doing at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise every day (see *The secret of youth* on page 26 for good ideas), limiting the amount of alcohol you drink, quitting smoking, and getting 400IU of vitamin D and 1200mg of calcium daily. Remember that yogurt and skim milk, as well as other foods such as salmon and sesame seeds, all contain calcium, so it's not difficult to get the amount you need for bone health. You can then get another bone mineral density test in a year's time, so that your doctor will be able to assess the rate of loss. If he or she suggests drug therapy, remember that the cost and the small risk of potential side effects are usually worth the benefit.

Q My husband has always enjoyed a couple of martinis before dinner, but he retired from a stressful job about four months ago and now he seems to be adding one or two more every evening. He's a big man and he can handle it, but I'm getting a little concerned about the long-term effects.

Rosie R., El Paso, Texas

A Frankly, I would be more concerned about the short-term effects. There's good evidence to show that modest consumption of alcohol, especially red wine, can be beneficial to the heart and brain, but the fact that your husband's intake of liquor has gone up since he retired is worrisome. Now that he doesn't have to get up for work, every day may seem like a holiday. Or could it be that, in common with many recently retired men, he's experiencing unfamiliar feelings of worthlessness and boredom, and is seeking the balm of a martini? Alcohol, however, is a depressant. It disrupts sleep. Insufficient and ineffective sleep leads to fatigue, irritability and lack of concentration. Even a big man, as he gets older, will find himself suffering the effects of immoderate drinking. As we age, our bodies lose both muscle and fat, and the bottom line is that a few cocktails go much further than they did when we were young. My advice is to try figuring out – together – why your husband has started drinking more at this particular time. You're going to have to make sure a martini remains a pleasure and doesn't turn into a habit. That could influence what should be some of your happiest years. ☺

Get in touch

Dr. Jason may be able to address your concerns in a future issue. Visit www.sunrisemagazine.net and click the "contact us" button, or write to the address on page 4.