# The Well Street Journal

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## CAPTAIN'S CORNER

*Greetings Rota,*

I hope all of you had a great holiday season and are well on your way with New Year's resolutions aimed at improving your health! It's never too late to start! Since this month is American Heart Month one resolution I would challenge all of us with is to "Know Your Numbers." You may be asking what numbers I'm referring to. And no, I'm not talking about your latest lottery number! Much more important than any winning lottery number is having good "Heart Healthy" numbers! By that I mean making sure each of you knows your current blood pressure and cholesterol level and even more importantly, knowing what they mean to your health! You should also know if your body weight is putting you at additional risk. Did you know that cardiovascular diseases (CVD) such as heart disease and stroke are among the leading killers of men and women and among all racial ethnic groups in America? More than 59 million Americans have some form of CVD, including such conditions as high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, stroke, and congestive heart failure. More than 2600 Americans die every day from CVD – an average of one every 33 seconds. These are truly staggering statistics. I'm sure many of you know of someone either in your own family, a close friend, or even a co-worker who has suffered from some form of CVD. The good news is that there are many steps you can take to reduce your overall risk of CVD while at the same time improving your overall quality of life. And this is where my staff can assist you! First, as I stated earlier, you need to know your numbers and you need to know what they mean. Your healthcare team is here to assist you with that. They're only a phone call away. Second, you should get a personal health risk assessment performed and have a one-on-one interview with a nurse to assess your lifestyle and the behaviors you may need to modify in order to get on the road to a "Heart Healthy" lifestyle. And third, you can talk with our Health Promotion staff, our Dietitian, or our Healthy Lifestyle Coordinator about a personal physical activity and eating plan designed just for you! As I've stated before, we are here for you! Please call on us! And help us achieve our goal of a making Rota a "Healthy Community." It will benefit all of us.

Until next time, *The Skipper*

**US NAVAL COMMUNITY ANNUAL**

# LOW FAT COOK OFF!

## THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2001

## 1200-1300 Naval Hospital Main Lobby

**Entry is easy:**

- Complete the registration form* and submit it to the Naval Hospital Dietitian's office, in person or by Guard Mail by Friday, March 2, 2001 to: Dietitian's Office, Box 18-102.
- Include your recipe on the back of the form with your entry.
- For questions, call ext. 3337.

*Forms are available at the hospital and throughout the base.

***GREAT PRIZES!***

**CATEGORIES:** appetizer, soup/salad, entreé, dessert

**JUDGED ON:** appearance, taste, nutritional value

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# Bright Ideas about Protecting Your Eyes from Sunlight

**LCDR Dale Barrette, MSC, USN**
**Head, Optometry Department**
**USNH Rota, Spain**

Almost every day I see people squint their eyes in the bright Spanish sunlight. In my opinion, the sun in Rota is the brightest I've encountered. This perception is due to many factors including air quality and geographic location. I'd like to share some useful information about protecting your eyes from sunlight, particularly the harmful part called ultraviolet (UV) light.

Everyone is at risk for eye damage by UV light. No one is immune to sunlight-related eye disorders. Certain medical circumstances can also predispose a person to eye damage from UV. Persons taking photosensitizing drugs or after cataract surgery can be more sensitive to light and eye damage. Special consideration for children is necessary since children tend to spend more time outdoors and can burn more easily. The majority of sun exposure occurs before age 18 and is cumulative over your lifetime. By starting simple sun protection steps early and consistently, they'll become an accepted habit, as easy as fastening seat belts every time you drive a car.

UV or ultraviolet radiation is a component of solar energy, but it can also be given off by artificial sources like welding machines, tanning beds and lasers. The UV light in sunlight is not useful for vision. More than 99 percent of UV radiation is absorbed by the front of the eye, although some does reach the retina. This UV absorption by the eye may contribute to age-related changes in the eye and a number of serious eye diseases. Protection can be simple, safe and inexpensive by wearing a brimmed hat and using eyewear that absorbs UV radiation.

Three types of UV radiation exist, including UV-A, UV-B, and UV-C. However, only UV-A and UV-B rays actually reach the Earth's surface and cause damage to our skin and eyes. UV-A rays are weaker than UV-B, can pass through glass and are suspected to contribute to both cataracts and macular degeneration. UV-B is partially absorbed by the ozone and can't pass through glass and primarily cause sunburn damage to the cornea (photokeratitis). UV-C rays are absorbed by the atmosphere and don't present any threat; however, man-made sources of UV-C are very harmful to the eyes.

When you're working on that perfect tan, lying on the beach in Rota or along the Costa del Sol, keep in mind that there are several factors that affect the intensity of UV radiation. UV radiation is highest between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm. In general, if your shadow is shorter than you are, UV radiation is at high intensity. If your shadow is longer, UV radiation is at lower intensity. When your shadow is short, seek shade. The time of year (season) is important, too. UV radiation is the least in the winter, highest in the spring and summer, and lower in the fall. You get higher UV exposure on snow, sand, water, or concrete, since these surfaces reflect UV rays. Cloud cover reduces UV levels, but not completely. Depending on the thickness of the cloud cover, it's possible to burn on a cloudy day even if it doesn't feel very warm.

What happens if you get too much sun? Overexposure to UV radiation poses the risk of serious health effects for everyone. People who work or play outdoors, especially in the snow or near water, are at the highest risk. People who are fair-skinned and have light-colored eyes (blue, green and gray) are also more at risk for skin problems, but remember that all people – no matter what skin type – are equally at risk of eye damage. **Kinds of eye damage include:**

*Photokeratitis* – Excessive, unprotected exposure to intense sunlight (or a tanning lamp) can burn the surface of the eye much like sunburn on the skin. It is painful, and you may have red eyes, a gritty feeling in the eyes, extreme sensitivity to light, excessive tearing and temporary loss of vision. The risk is highest where UV is reflected, such as pavement, water, or snow (snowblindness). Fortunately, photokeratitis is usually temporary with recovery in one or two days and rarely causes permanent damage to the eyes.

*Solar Retinopathy* – Staring directly at the sun, especially during a solar eclipse, can permanently scar the retina, the area at the back of the eye that is responsible for vision.

*Pterygium* – Pterygium is a growth of tissue on the white of the eye that may extend onto the clear cornea where it can block vision. It's seen most commonly in people who work outdoors in the sun and wind, and its prevalence is related to the amount of UV exposure. It can be removed surgically (but often recurs) and can cause cosmetic concerns and visual loss if untreated.

*Macular Degeneration* - Age-related macular degeneration is the major cause of blindness among Americans over age 55 and is an increasingly important problem as our population ages. It's age-related damage to the macula, the part of the retina near the center, where visual perception is most acute.

*Cataracts* – Exposure to even small amounts of UV radiation, especially UV-B, over many years can cause cataracts. Cataracts are a form of eye damage that produce a loss of transparency in the lens and blurs or clouds vision. Although correctable with eye surgery, cataracts are a major health problem in the United States and the most common surgical procedure among the elderly. Just 30 extra minutes of UV-B exposure per year can boost your risk of developing cataracts by about 10 percent. African Americans have four times the risk of getting cataracts compared to white people.

## TIPS FOR ENJOYING THE SUN SAFELY

- Limit mid-day sun as much as possible, and wear a hat (to reduce exposure by almost 50 percent) and sunglasses when out in the sun for extended periods. Seek shaded areas when possible.
- Choose sunglasses that are close-fitting or in a wrap-around style, which will prevent rays from filtering in from above and the sides. Sunglasses also protect delicate eyelids, too.
- Make sure your sunglasses block 99% or 100% of all UV rays (check the label) and are polarized to help reduce glare.
- If you feel that you must use a tanning booth, make sure the salon gives you sterilized protective eye goggles, as required by the FDA, and remove contact lenses if you wear them. Eye goggles should be tight-fitting and never removed during the tanning session.
- If you wear contact lenses, be sure to wear appropriate sunglasses as well, even if your contacts have UV protection. The effectiveness of UV-absorbing contact lenses against eye disorders related to UV exposure has not been established.
- Contact lenses with UV-blocking also provide UV protection against indoor UV radiation emitted by sources such as high wattage halogen and fluorescent lighting. These contact lenses can protect your eyes indoors when you're less likely to be wearing sunglasses.
- Encourage your children to wear sunglasses beginning in infancy when they're outdoors. UV damage is cumulative, and children's eyes are most vulnerable to UV injury.

While you enjoy your time in Spain, take advantage of these helpful hints to protect your eyes to last a lifetime. **If you have any questions regarding sun safety or other optometric topics, contact the eye clinic at ext. 3495.**

## FROM THE CHAPS...

# *"From Heart to Heart"*

In their book entitled *Children's Letters to God*, Stuart Hample and Eric Marshall compiled responses from children between the ages of six and nine years old. A young girl named Janet wrote, *"Dear Mr. God, I wish you would not make it so easy for people to come apart. I had 3 (three) stitches and a shot (today)."* It seems that regardless of how impressively designed the human body is, we can appear at times to be rather fragile both internally and externally. This isn't only true in a physical sense, but we also evidence vulnerability both emotionally and psychologically. Although our bodies are superbly constructed to protect our vital organs and skeletal mass with layers of skin and muscle tissue, occasional injuries do occur. In the unfortunate event that a major organ like the heart begins to malfunction, other essential systems within the body may be in jeopardy; resulting in the feeling that we are literally "coming apart at the seams."

In ancient times, it was believed that the heart was the "center" of the soul or the "seat" of personality and should be protected from all forms of defilement and polluted thoughts. According to Luke's writings in the New Testament, we're told, *"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart the mouth speaks."* (Luke 6:45) In other words, people have a perfectly healthy body, but if their attitude was controlled by negative or mean feelings their heart was regarded to be in poor condition. On the other hand, if people suffered from a non-life-threatening bodily condition, but their heart was filled with deep concern and affection for others, they were seen to be the healthier of the two. The late Dr. Howard Thurman, former professor of Religious Studies at Morehouse College and Howard University, offers this perspective, stating *"There is something in everyone of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have."* These insightful words bring fresh clarity to the age-old expression, *"Let your heart be your guide."*

Without a doubt, we're living in very different times, but the importance placed on the heart hasn't diminished with the passage of time. Most people would argue that a healthy heart is perhaps our highest priority toward achieving true wellness, regardless of whether one is speaking in a physical or spiritual context.

In essence, to neglect taking proper care of our hearts could result in the gradual and certain disintegration of the very fabric of our lives. Noted author Norman Vincent Peale presents this view on the matter, writing *"Keep your heart free from hate, your mind from worry. Live simply, expect little and give much. Fill your life with love. Scatter sunshine, forget self, think of others."* Each person is responsible for maintaining his or her own heart's well-being, and coping with one another's vulnerabilities requires that our lives be disciplined by the virtues that bind us all together, namely, faith, hope and of course, topping off this short list, is love.

***By LCDR A.T. Taylor, CHC, USN***

**If you would like to have the *Well Street Journal* mailed to you, please call the Health Promotions Department at ext. 3350.**

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