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Research Digest

Exclusive Sneak Peek

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Do low carbohydrate diets increase cardiovascular risk?

This meta-analysis found that low carb diets bump up LDL-C levels slightly. What's less clear is how much this matters.

INTERVIEW: Jason M. Valadão, MD, MA, MLS, Lieutenant Commander, US Navy

We chat with physician, naval officer, and author Jason Valadão about the nutritional strategies he uses with his patients, his top tip for gaining control of exercise and diet routines, and more.

Does a post-workout high GI meal improve sleep and next day training performance?

This study aimed to explore how a high glycemic index meal after an evening training bout affects both sleep and performance.

The anti-inflammatory effect of a vegan versus American Heart Association-recommended diet in coronary artery disease

Inflammation plays a major role in cardiovascular disease. This study examined whether a vegan or AHA-recommended diet can make a bigger impact on a major inflammatory marker in people with coronary artery disease.

INTERVIEW:

Jason M. Valadão, MD,
MA, MLS, Lieutenant
Commander, US Navy



Sports medicine seems to be more important than ever, with joint pain becoming more common seemingly every year. Do you include nutrition strategies as advice to patients? If so, what are some general and specific guidelines you offer them?

For me, every single patient encounter starts with a discussion about nutrition. Whether it is a young child, a college athlete, an adult in mid-life, or one of my geriatric patients, I find a way to incorporate nutrition into my plan, especially when it comes to joint pain; unfortunately this is not a common practice amongst practitioners, which can partially be attributed to the lack of nutrition training that an aspiring physician receives during medical school. There is a clear correlation between obesity and joint pain, specifically in the hips and knees, and thus diving into weight loss, exercise and maintaining a proper diet have become routine in my practice. I start off by having patients tell me what they enjoying doing for exercise, and if they don't specifically exercise I like to learn about their baseline activity level. From here I move into diet and calorie intake. I keep it simple because the health literacy surrounding types of calories, macronutrients, intake versus output, etc., are things that a majority of the population are not well versed in. I emphasize that there is not one perfect eating plan for everyone. But then I tell them what has worked for me and the thousands of patients that I have cared for and I always emphasize more plants (vegetables and fruits), nuts and seeds, because of their anti-inflammatory effects. I don't necessarily tell someone to strictly limit their protein and healthy-fat intake (unlike what I do for processed foods and many carbohydrates), but I offer that not all sources are the same. For instance, a piece of salmon with its propensity of omega-3 fatty acids, is likely a better choice for most people than a piece of steak or chicken breast. And if I can squeeze in the fact that dairy foods have been implicated in many cases of inflammation, and that tobacco products offer nothing positive when it comes to joint health and tissue healing, then I feel like I have made at least a small impact on the patient's life.

You've had an interesting career path. Can you tell us about it?

I went to college with the hope of becoming a physician. I enrolled in the pre-medicine program and was on my way, while at the same time becoming very focused on nutrition, exercise and health, and even spending time as a personal trainer and a manager at a General Nutrition Center (GNC)

store. Then, as often happens in life, my life took an alternate course. My roommate and I had gone to a career fair and were sold on becoming officers in the military. That adventure began during my senior year of college, just more than one year before the tragedy known today as September 11th. I would end up going to flight school, and would eventually serve on two different aircraft carriers during Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. Eventually I would find my way to the University of California, Berkeley, where I would become an adjunct professor in the Department of Naval Science, as well as a faculty fellow and volunteer coach with the university's football team. After 10 years of service in the Navy, an unexpected mentor walked into my life and helped me to recognize my dream of becoming a family and sports medicine physician was simply dormant and that I should do something about it. Now, in my 19th year of military service, I am serving others by teaching them the things I care so much about: eating right, exercise, finding balance with life and work, and establishing priorities.

How do military populations differ from the average Joe and average Jane, when it comes to injury recovery, diet, and other characteristics?

It is probably not as different as many people might think. I would actually contend that most military personnel (not counting those in the elite groups like the Navy SEALs, Army Rangers and other special operations units that are often considered the military's "athletes") live just like the average Joe and Jane, perhaps too many are letting themselves be even less than average. This is one of the motivations behind my desire to become a physician and serve my fellow service members. Tobacco and alcohol consumption continue to be quite high. Many military members are being forced to leave their respective services because they cannot pass basic fitness tests and maintain a healthy weight/BMI. In terms of those that do suffer injuries, physical therapy and rehabilitation services, much

like those seen in the civilian world, are readily available and more emphasis and funding is being put into health and well-being programs. The elite units that I mentioned previously have been transforming the way they do business for the past several years. Many have begun hiring strength and conditioning coaches from the collegiate and professional ranks, as well as athletic trainers, nutritionists, and other integrative health professionals, such as acupuncturists, chiropractors, yogis, psychologists and more. My presumption is that the health services these practitioners offer will begin to be available for all military personnel, not just those that are considered athletes.

Which non-diet, non-supplement sports medicine therapies do you find most interesting? This could be stuff like PRP that's done by traditional clinics, or alternative medicine strategies like acupuncture.

There are so many, and the more I read about and study them, the more I want to offer them to my patients. I try not to use prescription medications and over the counter supplements as much as possible because of the expense and side effects of such modalities. There are good supplements out there, but there are many more bad ones that make false claims, with little research to back them up, and even more that are unregulated for quality and content. It is the nature of my current position to always be looking into the latest research, much like that of what the team at Examine.com offers. More and more studies are coming out in regard to alternative medicine therapies, such as PRP (Platelet-Rich Plasma) and prolotherapy (dextrose and water) which have been shown to help with joint pain, tendinopathies and other soft tissue injuries. While insurance companies don't currently cover the fees for such procedures, I think we are just a few years away, especially when you look at the research behind the toxicity (damage to tissues such as cartilage) seen with many steroid and anesthetic preparations for joint injections. I first became exposed to acupuncture, dry needling, trigger

point injections and Eastern medicine techniques while in the military and when I was offered the opportunity to attend various courses I took advantage of it. I have used whole body, as well as auricular acupuncture (where needles are placed on specific landmarks of the ear only), and dry needling on hundreds of patients and I have seen some amazing results from the elimination of back pain, headache relief, decreased alcohol and tobacco use, relief of anxiety and depression, improvement in dietary habits and the list goes on. I know a lot of this sounds like witchcraft and the placebo effect is likely responsible in some cases, but with little to no side effects and the ease of use, I believe it may be worth it for many people. Herbal preparations are also gaining attention these days, and such things as turmeric, with its anti-inflammatory properties, have become a staple in my discussions with patients. I believe that physicians should always discuss alternative therapies with their patient's so that an informed decision can be made, especially when the risk of side effects is equal to or lower than the conventional measures typically offered.

There's a lot out there for people looking to improve their habits and lifestyle. What are the highest-efficacy tips, in your opinion, for someone looking to get control of their diet and routines?

I truly believe it begins with taking accountability of one's life. It all starts with looking in the mirror and deciding what you want. It's the reason I took a chance and wrote *Exceptional Every Day*. No one can eat right and exercise for you, unlike how you can get someone to clean your house, wash your car, or these days even pick up your groceries. You have to own who you are. You have to be willing to be vulnerable and ask for help when needed. There is tremendous madness when it comes to picking a great exercise routine that you will stick with, and the optimal diet that will provide you with the proper amount of energy to accomplish all of your daily tasks, while also allowing you to stay healthy and fit. If you're stuck, definitely seek out a mentor or a coach, even if it is just for a few weeks. Habits, especially healthy ones, take time to establish. Success has more to do with your mindset than anything else. ♦

Jason Valadão is an active duty United States Naval Officer that previously served as an aviator during Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom, and is board certified as a family medicine physician. He holds a doctor of medicine degree from the Medical College of Wisconsin, along with master's degrees from the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Oklahoma, and is currently completing a fellowship in sports medicine at Baylor University. Since 2009 he has served as an adjunct professor for Concordia University Irvine's Master's in Coaching and Athletics Administration Program, where he has taught over 1,000 students in various topics related to sports, health and performance. He has published several peer-reviewed journal articles and most recently authored his first book *Exceptional Every Day: An Empowering Process to Unlock Your Why and Transform Your Life*, which is set for release on April 2nd, 2019.