

Perspectives

Attack of Druid ladies and cholesterol blobs



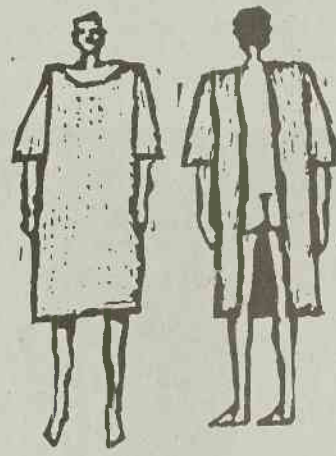
Dave Barry
columnist

I turned 50, which is really not so old. A lot of very famous people accomplished great things after 50. For example, it was during the post-50 phase of his life that the brilliant physicist Albert Einstein produced the vast majority of his drool. But still, when you're 50, you're definitely "getting up there," so I decided I'd better go in for my annual physical examination, which is something I do approximately every seven to nine years. I keep my physicals spaced out because my doctor, Curt, who is ordinarily a terrific guy, has a tendency to put on a scary rubber glove and make sudden lunges at my personal region.

Also Curt has some ladies who work with him—and again, these are very charming people—who

belong to some kind of Druid-style cult that has very strict beliefs under which they are not allowed to let you leave the office with any of your blood. They get you in a chair and distract you with charming conversation while they subtly take your arm and insert a needle attached to a long tube that goes outside to a 50,000-gallon tanker truck with a big sign that says "BLOOD." When they're done draining you, they don't even have to open the door to let you out; they just slide you under it. Somehow I got through my physical OK. But about a week later, Curt was working late one night at his office—perhaps going through the Official Catalog of Supplies for Doctor's Offices, which lists needles in sizes ranging all the way from

Extra Large to Harpoon, as well as an extensive collection of pre-1992 magazines with the last page of every article torn out—and he happened to glance up at his framed copy of the Hippocratic oath. This is an oath that is named after

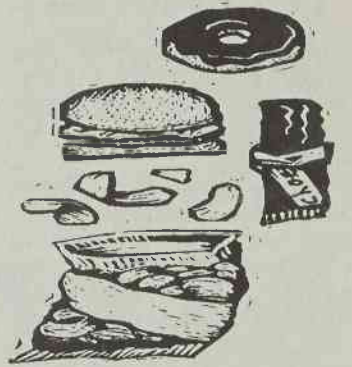


an ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, because he invented the following phrases, without which modern medical care would be impossible: "Do you have insurance?" "We're going to have to run some tests."

"You may experience some discomfort." "We're going to have to run some more tests." "The tests were inconclusive." Anyway, Curt was looking at the Hippocratic oath, which all doctors are required to take, and he noticed the sentence that says: "And I swear by my Lexus that if any person comes into my office for any reason, whether it be for a physical examination or simply to deliver the mail, I will find something medically wrong with that person." And so Curt, realizing that if he let me get out of my physical scot-free, burly agents of the American Medical Association Ethics Unit would come and yank his stethoscope right out of his ears, called me and told me that the cholesterol level in my blood was a little high. I tried to argue that this was no longer my problem, since all my blood was in the possession of the Druid ladies, but Curt insisted that I had to change my dietary habits. To help me do this, Curt sent me some informative medical pamphlets that explain to the lay person, via cartoons, what cholesterol is. Technically, it is a little blob-shaped guy with buggy eyes and a

big nose who goes running through your blood vessel, which is a tube going to your heart, which can be seen smiling in the background. Sometimes the blob guy gets stuck, causing him to get a grumpy expression and have a balloon come out of his mouth saying, "I'M STUCK." If too many cholesterol blobs get stuck, your blood vessel looks like a New York subway train at rush hour, and your heart gets a sad face, and surgeons have to go in there with a medical device originally developed by Roto-Rooter. To prevent this from happening, you need to be very careful about your diet, as follows: **FOOD GROUPS YOU CAN NOT EAT:** Meat, milk, cheese, butter, desserts, processed foods, fried foods, foods with skins, restaurant foods, foods your mom made, foods from packages, foods shown in commercials, foods containing flavor, foods being carried around on trays at wedding receptions, appetizers, snacks, munchies, breakfast, lunch, dinner, take-out, drive-thru, pina colodas, any food with a phrase such as "GOOD LUCK HERB!"

written on it in frosting. **FOOD GROUPS YOU CAN EAT:** Water (unsweetened), lowfat



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celery, wood chips. This diet has been difficult for me to follow. The worst part has been giving up cheese. I love cheese. I'm the kind of person who, merely while rummaging through the refrigerator to see what else is available, can easily gnaw his way through a hunk of cheddar the size of the late Sonny Liston. But I've been pretty good so far, and I'm hoping that my blood cholesterol will be a lot lower, if I ever develop blood again. Curt wants me to come back in and have it checked. He'll never take me alive.

Addicted to the Net

Excessive use harmful, psychologists say

(CPS) Diane Kerwin, a University of Chicago sophomore, used to spend 40 hours a week on the Internet, surfing or chatting with friends. But the Net began to interfere with her normal life, so now, she says, she's cut back to 35 hours. "My boyfriend dumped me because I spent too much time on-line, but he was a loser anyway," Kerwin, 22, said. "It hurt a lot, so I cut down." Kerwin admits that she is not like other college students who dial up the Net to research a paper, check football scores, or read a horoscope. Like an increasing number of computer users, she spends hours prowling the Internet and compulsively checking her electronic mail. "It's like an addiction for me, like booze or drugs for other people," she said. In fact, the obsession some college students have for the Net can spark mood swings, tear apart personal lives and disrupt studies, similar to drug and alcohol abuse, according to psychologists. In a study of 227 college students, three out of four said their use of the Internet upset various activities of daily life. As a group, college students—who at many campuses have free access to the Net—are considered to be at a high risk for Internet abuse, according to Janet Morahan-Martin, a Bryant College psychology professor who conducted the study. Students were considered "pathological addicts" if they admitted to four or more symptoms indicating abuse. "Compared to others, pathological users scored significantly higher (on a loneliness scale), were more likely to go on-line to relax, talk to others with similar interests, meet new people, and for support," she said. She also found that many Net addicts report that it's easier to open up and meet people on-line. Edwin Colon, 21, a University of Chicago junior, admitted that's why he enjoys chatting on the Net. He spends about 40 hours a week on-line.

"I express myself better on-line," he said. "I feel like the constraints of the keys allow me more freedom." Also, "I can talk to my friends in my underwear, and not be embarrassed," he said. But too much time spent on the Net can hurt attention to studies. Kimberly Young, a University of Pittsburgh psychologist, said some college students spend so much time on the Internet that they flunk out of college. Such obsessive behavior should be viewed by the mental health community as seriously as alcohol or drug abuse, said Young, who conducted a three-year study on Net



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addiction. Obsessive Internet users, or "dependents," stay on-line for hours each day and often create new personalities for themselves in chat rooms, she said. Over the course of her study, she identified 396 "dependents" and found that 42 percent were unemployed college students or homemakers. The "dependents" said they enjoy fantasy games similar to Dungeons and Dragons, where they can interact with people like themselves. They spend an average of 38 hours on-line each week, compared to eight hours a week reported by avid, but not addicted, Net users. "When asked about the main attractions of using these direct dialogue features," said Young, "86 percent of dependents reported

anonymity, 63 percent accessibility, 58 percent security, and 37 percent ease of use." Other users report that they like to "transform" and take on a new identity when they're in a chat room. Bonnie Mathis, a University of Chicago sophomore, said she creates a new personality for herself about once a week. "It allows me to experiment and change myself," she said. "It can get scary, with all the stories you hear, but nothing can go wrong if you are smart." A number of well-published cases have spelled out all too clearly what can go wrong. Earlier this year, a Barnard College student accused her cybersex pen pal of sodomy and torture. The alleged 20-hour ordeal happened when they finally met face-to-face, after weeks of exchanging messages over the Internet. The man, Oliver Jovanovic, a Columbia University doctoral candidate, has been charged with kidnapping, assault and sexual abuse. The woman is now suing to keep her e-mail correspondences—in which they discussed sadomasochistic experiences—from being entered into court. "My e-mail discussions are private... adventures... in which I push myself to think... to work out troubling philosophical problems," she wrote in an affidavit. "To have something that personal just handed over to the man that raped me... is like ripping something out of my soul." In her study, Young found that for many users, chat room relationships answer "a deep and compelling need in people whose real lives are interpersonally impoverished." The psychologist found her research subjects by sending a query out on the Internet. "Dependents" met certain criteria including: a preoccupation with the Internet; inability to control use; and restlessness, irritability or other withdrawal symptoms when trying to cut back use. Research subjects also said they had jeopardized relationships, jobs, and other opportunities for the Net.

Tips for first-year survival

(CPS) Ask a college junior or senior what they remember as the most difficult thing about their first days on campus, and most are quick to respond. "Not knowing what to expect," said Denise Palmer, a Brigham Young University senior. And perhaps just as bad, "not knowing anyone," said Beverlee Bailey, a senior at Columbia College in Chicago. Surviving the adjustment from high school to college can be a tough time for incoming students. There's dealing with roommates, being away from home, and coping with studies. In fact, national statistics indicate one out of four students will drop out after their freshman year. That's one reason why newcomers may want to seek out advice from those who know campus life best: upperclassmen. "Students are much more likely to believe the truth if it comes from other students," said Dr. Betsy Barefoot of the National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience at the University of South Carolina. "The most recent research indicates that the power of upperclassmen to affect the success of first-year students is unparalleled. With that said, here are some tips from a few seasoned colle-

gians on how to survive campus life and make the most of college years. ♦ **No Curfew, No Parents.** There's nothing quite as sweet as the first taste of freedom—but don't overdo it, students caution. "When you first get there, any holds that your parents had on

he had trouble adjusting to that. "There's no penalty for ditching, and I just didn't go," he said. "Go to class. Don't skip. It's a really bad, bad habit just to start," said Sarah Carlson, a University of Michigan junior. "Once you start, you think, 'Oh, that wasn't such a big deal.' Then you skip again and again. The problem is if you aren't there to hear the lecture, it's hard to understand it when it's on the exam." ♦ **Fitting In.** You don't know anyone yet, and your bags are barely unpacked, but it's time to register for classes. Where's the bookstore again? You don't even know your way around campus. "Take time to take care of yourself, no matter how busy things are, say students. Amber Zimmerman, an Eastern Illinois University senior, said trying to "fit in" to the social scene really stressed her out. "Now that I'm a senior, I'd tell freshmen not to try and fit in. Just be yourself," she said. "It's best to turn to others, whether you're confused about your major or fighting with your roommate, said April Richardson, a St. Phillips College sophomore. "Ask other people, upperclassmen mainly, for help," she said. "They've been around and should know what they're doing."

Other tips:

- ♦ Don't get too wrapped up with your studies
- ♦ Respect your roommates
- ♦ Avoid excessive partying

you vanish," said William Lee, a sophomore at Western Illinois University. "You have the option of doing whatever you want. If you want to get drunk the entire weekend, you can." Like it or not, there are no parents to wake you for class, no principals keeping class attendance. Brian Hulse, a sophomore at Utah Valley State College, said

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