

Corner Clinic: Our Experts Answer Your Health Questions

This month we talk about blood thinners, concussions in young athletes and the cancer-red meat link

By UC San Diego Health Experts | November 02, 2015

- [Do blood thinners actually make my blood thinner?](#)
- [How do I know when my child, the athlete, has had one concussion too many?](#)
- [The World Health Organization says red meat is “probably carcinogenic to humans” and processed meats, like ham and sausage, are carcinogenic. Should I stop eating bacon and hot dogs altogether?](#)



Do blood thinners actually make my blood thinner?

Megan Lang, PharmD, clinical pharmacist, UC San Diego Health's Anticoagulation Clinic

Patients and clinicians often refer to anticoagulants such as warfarin (marketed as Coumadin) and heparin as “blood thinners.” Actually, these agents do not “thin” the blood. These medications are used to prevent clots from forming by reducing active clotting factors in the blood.

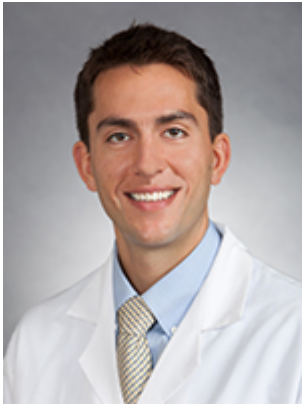
Patients taking these medications still have the same blood thickness or viscosity. Their blood is not less concentrated or “watered down,” and

there is also no change in body temperature regulation. The real change is that it takes longer for a patient's blood to form a clot, which reduces the risk of having a stroke (caused by a blood clot in the brain), a pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lung) or a deep vein thrombosis (blood clot in the leg).

How do I know when my child, the athlete, has had one concussion too many?

Alan Shahtaji, DO, primary care physician and sports medicine specialist in the UC San Diego Concussion Clinic

There is not a definitive number of concussions that absolutely disqualifies an athlete from competition. We take into account a number of variables, such as the age of the child, the sport



played, comorbid conditions and length of recovery from previous concussions. In general, with each concussion there is a lower threshold for a subsequent concussion and a greater risk of prolonged recovery with three or more concussions.

"If you've seen one concussion, you've seen one concussion," is a phrase that I really like because it promotes the idea that no two cases are the same, and therefore we should evaluate each young athlete instead of applying a generic policy.

I would advise that every child's concussion should be evaluated by a sports concussion expert to make sure recovery has occurred and consider baseline testing before the child returns to activity. Once a young athlete has had multiple concussions, parents or guardians should discuss current and future risk of brain injury with a sports concussion specialist. Since contact sports carry a higher risk for head injuries, switching to a non-contact sport is a reasonable compromise option for a young athlete who has sustained head injury. Remember, the young athlete only has one brain and protecting it during development is crucial.



The World Health Organization says red meat is “probably carcinogenic to humans” and processed meats, like ham and sausage, are carcinogenic. Should I stop eating bacon and hot dogs altogether?

Christine Zoumas, RD, director, [Healthy Eating Program](#), UC San Diego Health's Moores Cancer Center

The World Health Organization's report evaluated more than 800 studies investigating several types of cancer in relation to the consumption of red meat and processed meat. The report concluded that there was sufficient and strong evidence that eating processed meat can cause colorectal cancer and limited evidence showing an association between eating red meat and developing colorectal cancer, which is how they arrived at the classifications “carcinogenic to humans” and “probably carcinogenic to humans,” respectively.

The report measured the strength of the evidence, not the magnitude of the risk of cancer with meat consumption. It did not make dietary recommendations or give a “safe” amount. What we can learn from this report is that there may be a larger risk of colorectal cancer with an increased intake of red meat and processed meat. These findings further support the current public health recommendations from several international and national cancer organizations to limit the intake of red meat and consume very little, if any, processed meat. So should you stop eating bacon, hot dogs or red meat altogether? Not necessarily. Both can be incorporated into a healthy diet that includes calorie balance and a variety of fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains and lean protein sources, such as fish, chicken, tofu and beans.

Care at UC San Diego Health

- → [Anticoagulation Clinic](#)
 - → [Sports Medicine](#)
 - → [Healthy Eating Program](#) 
-