



# USA WEEKEND

SEPTEMBER 16-18, 2005  
usaweekend.com

USA WEEKEND  
PARTNERS WITH  
**Prevention**  
FOR A  
SPECIAL

# Women's Health Report

- **Brooke Shields** on the truth about new moms and depression
- 11 energy-boosting tips
- Dr. Tedd looks at your heart
- Natural ways to lower breast cancer risk

**CookSmart:**  
Hearty fall dinner

---

TV's best  
comebacks

---

A NASA  
scientist  
discusses  
Mars



# Health Briefs

FOR EVERYONE

## ■ BRAIN: Help it stay sharp while helping your heart

Four factors that are bad for your heart — smoking, high cholesterol, diabetes, hypertension — also are bad for your brain. “Surprisingly, the clock starts ticking sooner than we thought for Alzheimer’s and other dementias. Changes in the brain are already under-

**People with high cholesterol are 42% more apt to develop dementia.**

way at middle age,” says Rachel Whitmer, lead researcher in a study that followed 9,000 HMO members for an average of 30 years. “People in their early 40s who have all four factors more than double their odds of getting dementia, regardless of gender, race or education.” Even one risk factor ups the odds. Example: People with high cholesterol are 42% more likely to develop dementia.

The good news? These risks are under your control. If you’re thinking about waiting until your 40s or 50s to quit smoking, lose weight, exercise and clean up your diet, think again! Start young to protect both your heart and your brain.

— Susan T. Lennon

### ■ POT: Cannabis isn't as harmless as suggested

Cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug in the United States. But if you think it's hot to smoke pot, consider this: Two recent studies show that cannabis damages the vessels in your brain by constricting blood flow — putting you at risk for stroke.

#### Pot raises the risk for stroke.

It makes no difference whether you smoke it, eat it or take a pill. The active ingredient tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the culprit. The stronger its concentration — ranging from 1% in some herbal preparations to 65% in some hashish oils — the greater the danger. Long-term and heavy users are at risk.

Cannabis has long been associated with harmful changes in the brain; now sophisticated medical tools can pinpoint them. One study demonstrates that impairment of the brain's blood flow persists for at least a month after the last high. This eventually can lead to a stroke and its resulting paralysis, and problems with vision, memory and speech.

What about medical marijuana? Scientific studies are underway to nail down its usefulness and safety, especially as an aid for pain. **W**

— Susan T. Lennon