



ents and caregivers. Health Canada also re-issued its safety messages in parenting publications.

Safety tips continue to be offered to parents and caregivers in Health Canada's publication "*Is Your Child Safe?*" and the department plans to release an education bulletin on the safety of curtain and blind cords.

In April of this year Health Canada officials met with members of the Canadian window-covering industry to explore additional ways to eliminate the potential strangulation hazard presented by blind and drapery cords. As a result, an advisory committee that includes consumers, health care professionals and representatives from the industry will be established to develop a Canadian standard.

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Folic acid and the pill

It seems that we all agree on the benefits of folic acid fortification for women of child-bearing age as a means of reducing the frequency of neural tube defects, as outlined in the article "Folic acid fortification: What does it mean for patients and physicians?" (*CMAJ* 1998;158[6]:773-4), by Drs. Linda Turner and Catherine McCourt. I'm pleased that Health Canada has initiated a study "to determine whether food fortification is accompanied by a reduction in the detectable incidence of neural tube defects . . . and . . . leads to an improvement in the blood folate status of women of reproductive age who do not take oral supplements."

However, I'm disappointed that no action has been taken on my suggestion¹ of an interim measure to improve dietary folate intake in a group

of women in whom periconceptual folic acid fortification could readily be achieved. If all oral contraceptive regimens were converted to a 28-day cycle for which the 7 inert pills were replaced by tablets containing an appropriate dose of folic acid, at least those women who are practising contraception would be better prepared for the time when conception becomes their intent.

This may seem an odd suggestion from a university professor, but sometimes further study is a poor substitute for getting on with something that is patently justified by good evidence from other jurisdictions!

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Reference

1. McSherry JA. Folate to prevent neural tube defects [letter]. *CMAJ* 1995;152(7):1043.

[The authors respond:]

The evidence that taking dietary supplements containing folic acid around the time of conception reduces the risk of neural tube defects is compelling. Over the past several years, interest has focused on 2 ways of increasing women's intake of folic acid during the critically important early weeks of pregnancy — encouraging women to begin taking oral supplements before conception occurs and fortifying foods with folic acid. Dr. McSherry's suggestion demonstrates that there are other creative approaches to increasing the intake of folic acid among women of reproductive age. Product development is the purview of industry, but individuals, organizations of health care professionals, and consumer groups could certainly encourage manufacturers of oral contraceptives to develop the type of product that McSherry advocates. Moreover, an-

other point in McSherry's letter of Apr. 1, 1995,¹ is well taken. He stated that physicians "must get used to discussing future conception as well as current contraception" with patients. Office visits by women to discuss family planning and to obtain contraceptives provide many opportunities for health care professionals to discuss the importance of good health habits during the preconception period; such discussions could easily include information about the benefits to the fetus of taking vitamin supplements containing folic acid around the time of conception.

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Reference

1. McSherry JA. Folate to prevent neural tube defects [letter]. *CMAJ* 1995;152(7):1043.

Watch your step!

Drs. Paul G.W. Woolfrey and R. Lee Kirby should be congratulated for reporting an easily preventable complication associated with diabetic neuropathy, in their article "Hypodermic needles in the neuropathic foot of a patient with diabetes" (*CMAJ* 1998;158[6]:765-7). Given that the occurrence of foreign bodies in the skin of people with sensory neuropathy of any type could to a large degree be avoided, it is unfortunate that we have been unable to convince people with these conditions of the value of examining their feet. It is well established that simple foot care and prevention of skin lesions due to foreign bodies and to sites of excessive pressure, such as folds in socks, can substantially re-