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This Week

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Cover: Health experts have spent decades trying to curb the public's appetite for high-fat foods, alcohol, and sex. New research suggests a welcome change in direction. Recent findings indicate that moderate indulgence in certain no-nos may actually improve longevity. **Page 142**
(Image: Super Stock)

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Letters

Fertility linked to cycle length

Menstrual cycle length has a major impact on fertility, contrary to the report dismissing any impact of PCB-induced shorter menstrual cycles on fertility ("Fishy PCBs shorten menstrual cycle," SN: 12/20&27/97, p. 410). The difference between short cycles (26 days or less) and normal cycles (27 days or more) is most noticeable in in vitro embryo transfer programs. A study of 173 patients in the October 1988 FERTILITY AND STERILITY showed a significantly higher pregnancy rate (30.2 percent versus 9.4 percent) in women with longer cycles.

Women should decline to eat PCB-laden fish from Lake Ontario.

Mattie Coxe
Baton Rouge, La.

EMFs attract controversy

The article on the effects of electromagnetic fields ("EMFs' Biological Influences," SN: 1/10/98, p. 29) contains little news and less science.

Dismissing in one sentence the expert panel convened by the National Academy of Sciences, which pronounced after a 3-year study that "the current body of evidence does not show that exposure to these fields presents a human health hazard" and ignoring other studies with the same finding, such as that of the American Physical Society, the author cites at length EMF consultant Cindy Sage, whose claims include, on the basis of unspecified studies, an "up to sixfold increase in childhood leukemia" on exposure to 4- to 5-milligauss magnetic fields.

Peter Palffy-Muhoray
Kent, Ohio

While the NAS report found no evidence that fields present a hazard to human health, it did conclude that EMFs can induce effects on biological systems. Nowhere in the SCIENCE NEWS story does it say that EMFs cause harm—the jury is still out. However, a host of studies have pointed statistically to the possibility of adverse effects, including several that have been reported in SCIENCE NEWS. The "up to sixfold increase" Sage mentions comes from data published in a report by Martha S. Linet et al. *in the July 3, 1997 NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE.* —J. Raloff

My husband and I wonder why the fields given in the chart do not follow the inverse square law. If a person is twice as far away from a source of EMFs, we would expect the magnetic field to be one-fourth as strong. Instead, it seems to be one-tenth as strong, one-third as strong, one-seventh as strong, etc., depending upon the appliance.

Can you clarify this?

Elaine Woodall
Jermyn, Pa.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, EMFs don't always follow so predictable a rule. For large power lines, they may fall off proportionally to the distance, but for fields associated with home appliances, they may be tempered by factors such as the size and shape of the appliance and how the

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