

Women's Health

Health woes plague abuse victims

Spousal violence linked to illnesses
34,000 batterings recorded in 2002

ELVIRA CORDILEONE
STAFF REPORTER

Tylaine Duggan's husband punched her in the face and broke her nose. Two months later, she suffered a stroke.

After 10 years of enduring frequent abuse, Duggan separated from the man, her third husband, who was charged with several counts of assault.

She says the marriage wasn't her introduction to family violence: Duggan says she was sexually violated by a relative when she was 13.

Three failed marriages and four children later, Duggan sits in a cushy leather armchair in her downtown Toronto condo and tells her story. She shares the home with her common-law husband, Kirk Jensen, and her 15-year-old daughter.

Duggan is petite and looks younger than her 43 years. Her humour and animated tone and gestures are at odds with the story of suffering she tells.

"My health has been steadily declining," says Duggan, as she lights another cigarette.

Shortly after divorcing her second husband in 1987, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer and bleeding ulcers.

She contends with irritable bowel syndrome, a condition that sends her to the toilet eight to 16 times a day after she eats. So she eats little.

She drinks beer instead, six to eight glasses a day, for sustenance, she says, for its calories and sugars. And to kill pain because she can't swallow pills, not even an Aspirin.

She sleeps little. "The nightmares, you know?"

Through it all, Duggan not only managed to support her family, she built a successful media wire service, which she later sold. She now runs an electronic information service in the financial district and plans to expand.

Although the brutality of that marriage is behind her, the fear that her ex will walk through the door and kill her is not.

Dr. Harriet MacMillan, a psy-



MICHAEL STUPARYK/TORONTO STAR

"My health has been steadily declining," says Tylaine Duggan, who left a husband who battered her often over a 10-year period.

chologist, pediatrician and professor at McMaster University, is studying how family violence affects mental health. (She'll be speaking on the topic at the Women's Health Forum & Expo.)

Although her research isn't finished, MacMillan says "intimate partner" violence is closely associated with an increased risk of emotional impairment. It can result in depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress, which can translate into symptoms such as unrelenting fear, nightmares and numbness.

A 2002 study commissioned by Health Canada's National Clearinghouse on Family Violence found family violence, defined as physical, emotional, financial or sexual abuse or neglect, is a health-care issue.

The report, called Health Effects of Family Violence, concludes that women subjected to violence have a host of short- and long-term health problems.

'I never even realized I was a battered woman'

Pat Kelln, spousal abuse victim

High stress levels in violent households can cause conditions such as lupus, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome and chronic pain to flare up, or worsen.

"Even when family violence does not result directly in injury and illness, some people exposed to (it) cope with their situation and feelings in ways that are harmful to their health, research suggests," the report said.

Coping strategies could include addictions, such as smoking and drinking, and other self-destructive behaviours, ranging from poor eating habits to self-mutilation.

Dr. Jackie Thomas, a gynecologist and co-chair of the Domes-

tic Violence Awareness Committee at Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital, says spousal abuse, which is experienced by one in four women, costs the Canadian health-care system more than \$1.5 billion a year. "In the time these people have these problems, they're not productive to society and potential benefits (contributions they might have made) aren't there any more," says Thomas.

Police recorded more than 34,000 incidents of spousal violence in Canada in 2002, of which almost 29,000 were perpetrated by men against women, Statistics Canada reports. Ontario's Women's Directorate shows 15,000 women and 13,000 dependent children were admitted to Ontario shelters in 1998 as a result of spousal violence.

According to Thomas, 25 women are killed in Ontario every year in domestic violence.

Pat Kelln, 50, of Vancouver, almost became a statistic herself when her husband of eight years nearly strangled her. She left him and they were divorced.

"I never even realized I was a battered woman," Kelln says. "I thought the broken rib was an accident. But you're not thinking straight."

"You're tired all the time, sick all the time."

The man was charged with assault and placed on probation.

Now in a loving relationship, Kelln does volunteer work to try to help other women in violent relationships.

Her website, www.domesticabusemuststop.org, offers legal information.

After living with her relative's alleged abuse for decades, Duggan took steps to press charges.

"I don't want to live like this any more. I thought I'd go back to the past and confront what happened," she says.

Low-fad diets key, nutritionists warn

Trendy food regimens just don't work
Balanced eating, right carbs essential

DONNA JEAN MACKINNON
STAFF REPORTER

Experts are expressing concern over the popularity of unbalanced low-carb, high-protein diets.

"Atkins, The Zone, Scarsdale, Protein Power have been on the bestseller lists for four decades. These books sell, but do the diets really work?" asks Andrea Miller, a registered dietitian at Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre.

People initially lose weight on these programs, mainly because they lower their caloric intake, but there are flaws to this approach, says Miller, who is speaking at the Women's Health Matters Forum tomorrow on "Carbohydrates 101: What the heck am I supposed to eat?"

"Canadians are used to a wide choice of food . . ." says Miller. "The low-carb diets limit this choice and people lose interest and fall off the diet."

That can lead to a vicious cycle of dieting, especially for women 18 to 30, who are most likely to buy into a super thin body image.

The major problem with low-carb diets is the elimination of an entire category of food. Without carbs — no bread, rice, cereal, potatoes, pasta, fruit, dairy foods, baked desserts, alcohol and limited vegetables — we lose a major source of nutrients and vitamins, says Miller.

Each nutrient has a special function: Some create energy (calories), some build and repair cells and others help prevent disease, she says.

Health Canada says Canadians should take in 45 per cent to 65 per cent of their total energy from carbohydrates.

Glucose, which comes naturally from fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes, is essential for the brain.

The body also needs glucose for activities as basic as breathing and walking. Months into a low-carb diet, the body uses up its reserves of glucose, in the liver.

Then it targets muscle as an alternative energy source and starts breaking it down. This can lead to dehydration, increased fatigue and constipation. Kristyn Hall, a nutritionist and registered dietitian with the Calgary Health Region, worries about the portrayal of low-carb diets as a panacea for slimming down.

"We have a saying here, healthy eating is like cotton underwear. It's not sexy, but it's comfortable

and does the job," she says.

Hall agrees that in the short term, cutting out carbs results in weight loss.

But in her practice, she has observed constipation and women feeling weak and fatigued without sufficient carbohydrates.

"Women work themselves so hard. Without carbs, they don't have the fuel they need," she says.

"We are not saying, 'Have refined carbohydrates,' but rather, 'Choose healthy ones, such as legumes and whole grains.'"

Both Miller and Hall point out that Atkins-style diets are low in calcium, which increases the risk of osteoporosis.

They are also low in folate, which can create problems for women who intend to breast-feed.

Looking closely at low-carb diets, Miller discovered that in the initial phase they provide only 800 to 1,200 calories per day, while the typical adult woman eats 1,800 to 2,500 when not dieting.

"The same weight loss would occur if we simply ate half of everything we normally eat," Miller says.

"If people could do this on their own, then the diet books would not be bestsellers."

Studies were conducted by the Philadelphia Veteran Affairs Medical Centre and the Univer-

sity of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*) to find out what happens to people who stay on Atkins-style diets for six months and for a year.

In both studies, researchers found Atkins dieters lost more weight than low fat dieters in the first six months.

But over an extended period (a year), researchers concluded that some people lost lots of weight, some lost a little and some actually gained.

In other words, in the long haul, weight loss results were the same as for any traditional lower fat diet that calls for moderate eating, according to Miller.

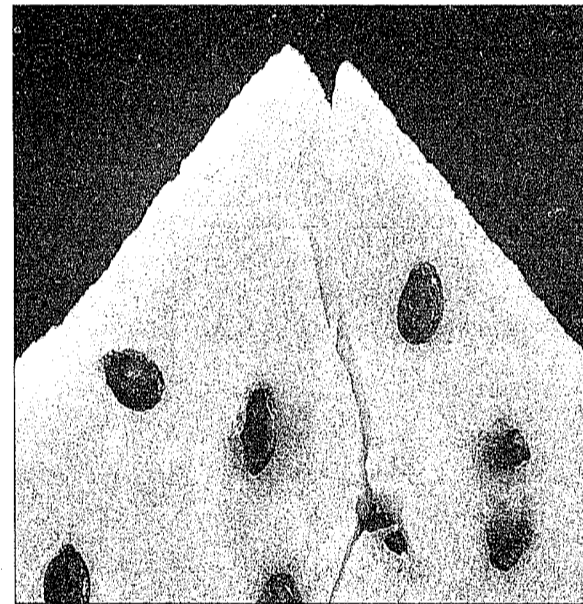
Hall is impressed with an American initiative, the National Weight Control Registry, run by the University of Pittsburgh.

To register, a person must lose a minimum of 30 pounds and keep it off for a year.

Researchers discovered all the people registered had one thing in common: The habit of eating breakfast, which keeps them from becoming so hungry they make bad food choices later in the day, Hall says.

Miller and Hall advise eating balanced meals that include all food categories, using the Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (www.hc-sc.gc.ca, click on Healthy Living, then Food & Nutrition).

"For good health, each woman has to find the correct balance of foods that are sustainable for her," Miller says.



KRT PHOTO

Low-carb diets eliminate fruits like watermelon, which means dieters lose a big source of nutrients and vitamins, nutritionists say.

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