



PHARMACY UPDATE: SANTA'S HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS



Santa is clearly a very jolly and forgiving character. Despite this happy façade, there are reservations about his status as a role model: he is clearly a creature of habit and without a doubt a late adopter of the latest evidence concerning health and lifestyle. While Santa remains quite a recluse for most of the year, there are many observations that we can make around Christmas time that would suggest a thorough medical assessment is overdue.

Observation	Risk	Strategy
Santa carries a lot of fat concentrated on his midsection.	Obviously there is a difference between the calories that he ingests and burns. The medical literature provides plenty of evidence that obesity places him an increased risk of a range of problems, including: diabetes mellitus, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, heart disease, and some forms of cancer.	Switching his diet from high calorie (including cookies, brandy and cake) to low calorie options will result in a reduction in his waistline. A range of medicines are probably being prescribed – from sugar pills and anti-inflammatory agents to anti-hypertensives and cholesterol lowering medicines – to reduce the symptom burden that he must be experiencing. He is at great risk of polypharmacy.
Santa does not appear to change his clothes.	While some may argue that the red outfit is a uniform, it would be quite appropriate to explore this further, with his loved ones. Santa has a number of risk factors for Alzheimer's (including his age) and this should be investigated further. Alzheimer's may also be associated with other mental health issues such as depression for physical issues such as incontinence.	While medicines play a big role in slowing the progression of Alzheimer's, medicines may also be necessary to reduce the burden of other issues associated with this condition.
Santa is an alcoholic.	The ruddy face and "beer gut" adds weight to the argument that Santa likes a drink or two. Reports from around the globe vary about Santa's preferred beverage. It is likely to be some type of beer or spirit such as scotch. This has major implications for his liver, not to mention his drink	While water should be his beverage of choice, it is clear that going cold turkey after years of chronic alcohol consumption may also be dangerous. Therefore discussion of the appropriate use of long acting benzodiazepines may be necessary in the interim.

	driving record.	
Santa has a disregard for safety.	Occupational health and safety regulations surely would recommend safety harness and helmet when riding in an open sleigh. Climbing up and down chimneys without the necessary safety supports too is loaded with risk.	Immediate risk assessment is required including a falls assessment. Many medicines – including benzodiazepines and opioids – are associated with an increased risk of falls.
Santa is a workaholic.	While his type A personality provides drive to achieve a huge level of activity in preparation for Christmas Eve, it is also a risk factor for hypertension.	Meditation and yoga while useful may need to be supplemented with blood pressure medicines, including: betablockers, diuretics and ACE.
Santa lives a sedentary lifestyle.	Santa's supervisory role implies that his responsibilities are predominantly desk bound. Even on his most active night of the year, he's been reported to be pulled around by a herd of reindeer. We expect that poor effort to exercise combined with his unconventional diet must add to his risk of constipation.	Australian guidelines suggest that adults should achieve at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity every day. Constipation could be relieved with a change in diet and the inclusion of regular aperients. This is particularly important if he is already on medicines that contribute to constipation, including: opioids and medicines with anti-cholinergic activity (e.g. TCAs).

Clearly, polypharmacy is likely to be a major concern with Santa, leading to a range of medication-related problems, including: noncompliance, adverse drug reactions and drug interactions. Home Medication Reviews are an Australian Government funded initiative to support GPs and aged care staff to obtain an independent pharmacist's review of their patient's use of medicines.

So as you wake up on Christmas morning, spare a thought for the older people that we care for: medicines that we can often take for granted can also create more problems than it is worth.

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