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Newsletter

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Music to Soothe the Aching Back

Just think about the power of music: It can bring an isolated person out of their shell, make a sad person feel happy, and provide inspiration and support in time of need. For people who are in chronic pain, a new study shows that music can make a big difference in the way people feel about themselves and their ability to deal with the pain.

In the study, 60 people suffering from chronic back pain, neck pain and other conditions were recruited from pain and chiropractic clinics, and divided into two groups. One group listened to music on headsets for one hour per day for seven consecutive days, while a control group did not listen to music at all. Among those who listened to music, half could choose the music themselves, while the other half selected from five relaxation recordings provided by the researchers.

After one week, people who listened to music reported that their pain had decreased by between 12 percent and 21 percent; in the group of patients who didn't listen to music, however, their pain levels actually increased 2 percent. People who listened to music also reported feeling less depressed and less disabled, and felt that they had more power over their pain, than people in the control group.

Of course, while this study shows that music can help reduce pain, it doesn't mean that chiropractic care is any less effective. Music is simply another instrument chiropractors can recommend to their patients as a means of pain relief. An adjustment from a chiropractor is one of the best, most effective ways of treating back pain and other ailments - with or without musical accompaniment!

Siedliecki SL, Good M. Effect of music on power, pain, depression and disability. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* June 2006; 54(5)553-562.

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Students Need Not Suffer Summer Slide

U.S. educators say that parents can avoid the "summer slide" when children forget what was taught during the school year. Teachers often spend four to six weeks at the beginning of each school year re-teaching material that students have forgotten, according to Ron Fairchild, executive director of the Center for Summer Learning at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Fairchild encourages parents to make the most of children's summer vacation and suggests:

- + Find out what your child will be learning during the next school year and preview concepts and materials.
- + Encourage reading every day.
- + Many summer camps often have an educational or enrichment focus.
- + Keep a schedule over the summer and help children to stay in daily routines.
- + Take educational trips.
- + Practice math skills every day -- whether during trips to the grocery, tracking daily temperatures or playing educational games.
- + Limit time with TV and video games.

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Small Things Can Increase Child's Safety

Preventing child accidents involves teaching children safety habits and having adults follow safety habits as well, a London official says. "Most accidents are caused by very simple things -- like a toddler tripping on a toy and falling downstairs, or someone spilling a hot drink while passing it over a child's head. Nearly 300 children are admitted to (a British) hospital every day because of accidents and, tragically, nearly every day one child dies," says Katrina Phillips, chief executive of Child Accident Prevention Trust.

"We want to remind parents, grandparents, older children, child-minders -- and everyone who comes into contact with children -- that preventing accidents doesn't have to be a big deal." Spending a couple of minutes teaching children to put their toys away, making a resolution never to pass hot drinks over a child's head, getting into the habit of always putting matches and cleaning products in a safe place, maintaining smoke alarm and watching speed when driving, can mean the difference between safety and serious injury for a child, according to Phillips. Parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, older children and family friends can find tips on how to put a child's safety first at the trust's website www.capt.org.uk.

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Pregnant Women Should Guard Against Heat

During summer months, pregnant women should take extra steps to avoid complications from the sun and dehydration, warns Dr. Amy Murtha of Duke University Medical Center. She advises pregnant women to be careful and not get too hot and to drink enough fluids to stay hydrated. "In the summer, women who don't drink enough can get dizzy, light-headed and have headaches," Murtha said. "We generally recommend that women drink between six to eight eight-ounce glasses of juice or water each day to avoid any potential problems. If they don't, they can put themselves at risk for complications." Pregnant women should also avoid extended exposure to the sun during the summer, because hours in the sun can lead to overheating that can harm the fetus, according to Murtha.

Body temperature, taken under the arm, should not exceed 101 F, she said. Pregnant women should also avoid hot tubs since they can cause the core body temperature to rise quickly.

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Vegetables Help Prevent Arteriosclerosis

A U.S. study finds that vegetables -- freeze-dried broccoli, green beans, corn, peas and carrots -- may help reduced hardening of the arteries. The study in mice found that a mixture of the top five common vegetables reduced hardening of the arteries by 38 percent compared to animals eating a non-vegetable diet, according to researchers at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine. "While everyone knows that eating more vegetables is supposed to be good for you, no one had shown before that it can actually inhibit the development of arteriosclerosis," said study leader Michael Adams. "This suggests how a diet high in vegetables may help prevent heart attacks and strokes." Despite compelling evidence supporting the health benefits of increased vegetable consumption, U.S. intake remains low. The mean consumption is 3.2 servings per day, with about 40 percent coming from starchy vegetables such as potatoes, according to Adams. The findings are published in the *Journal of Nutrition*.

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Ice Best for Strain or Sprain

Whether an injury is a strain or sprain, ice is always a good first choice, advises a U.S. expert. "A strain is an inflammation of muscles or tendons that can range from mild to moderate or severe, depending upon the degree of damage," says Ned Shannon, head athletic trainer and instructor at the University of Indianapolis. "A sprain is an injury to the ligaments of a joint, to varying degrees of severity." Ice reduces swelling and eases the pain, according to Shannon. Heat is good later on when those symptoms have subsided, but muscles feel tight," he said. However, it is also important is to allow the injury to heal by not working the same muscles, tendons or ligaments. "Engage in an alternative activity -- what we call 'active rest.' You're not doing the same activity but you're staying active," Shannon said. "Swimming is a great alternative to many injuries, such as ankle sprains, because it is not weight bearing." Any injury that results in more than minor swelling or pain should be checked out by a healthcare professional, Shannon notes.

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Most Stings Annoying, But Some Serious

For most children, the biting and stinging insects of summer are just minor annoyances, but for some it can be a serious problem, says a U.S. expert. Dr. Margie Andreae of the department of pediatrics and communicable diseases at the University of Michigan Medical School says the vast majority of people will only have a localized reaction to a bug bite or sting. "However, about 3 percent of the population may develop an allergic reaction, including symptoms of a rash and hives that are distant from the site of the bite or sting that will require medical attention," she says. Should a severe allergic reaction occur -- difficulty breathing or swallowing -- Andreae says to call 911 and seek emergency care immediately. However, if stung by a bee or wasp: remove the stinger using a firm object like a credit card to sweep across the site and pull out the stinger, clean the area using soap and water, apply ice, add hydrocortisone cream to help relieve redness and pain and take a pain reliever and an antihistamine.

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Most U.S Drivers Use Cell Phones

Despite knowing that driving and talking on a cell phone at the same time is dangerous, a majority of U.S. drivers talk on the cell phone while driving. This is especially true with younger adults, even in states that have laws requiring the use of a hands-free device. Many adults are not using the hands-free devices, according to a Harris Poll of 2,085 U.S. adults surveyed online by Harris Interactive. About three-quarters of adults who drive and have a cell phone say that they talk on their cell phone while driving, while 67 percent say that they sometimes talk on their cell and drive, while only 6 percent admit to doing this all the time. Twenty-seven percent say that they never talk on their cell while driving. This pattern holds pretty much across all regions of the country, with higher numbers in the Midwest at 76 percent and the South at 77 percent. Only in those states that have a law that requires use of a hands-free device -- New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Washington, D.C. -- are the percentages lower at 61 percent.

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Exercise Key to Maintaining Healthy Bones

Finnish and Brazilian studies show the importance of exercise in children and teens for building peak bone mass to protect against osteoporosis. Miryoung Lee of Wright State University School of Medicine in Ohio, who tracked 99 children ages 8 to 18, found for both sexes, the rate of bone accumulation was found to be higher with increasing leisure activity.

Researchers in Finland also emphasized how important it is to not only start but maintain regular exercise. Marjo Lehtonen-Veromaa of Turku University Central Hospital tracked 142 girls and found that the third of the girls who exercised most had the highest increase of 24 percent in thigh bone mineral content over the seven-year study period, while the third who exercised the least had a bone increase of 16 percent. Fernando Siqueira and colleagues from the Federal University of Pelotas, Brazil, questioned 1,000 individuals age 50 and matched their osteoporosis history with their history of physical activity between ages 10 and 19. Siqueira found those who were active in adolescence had a 45-percent lower risk for osteoporosis.

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Cigarette Smoke Weakens Bones

Cigarette smoke, even secondhand smoke, can weaken bones and increase risk for fractures, according to three studies, two in Sweden and one in China. The deleterious effects of smoking can readily be detected in young bones, according to researchers who tracked the bone mineral density of healthy young Swedish men ages 18 to 20. "We clearly demonstrate that young smokers also have significant losses in bone density," says Mattias Lorentzon of Gothenburg University. In a separate study, Gothenburg University researcher Dan Mellstrom and co-workers found that in elderly men a history of smoking is associated with weak bones and almost a two-fold increase in vertebral-fracture incidence. In the first ever analysis of the effects of secondhand smoke on bone density, Yu-Hsiang Hsu and colleagues from the Harvard School of Public Health found 14,000 rural Chinese men and premenopausal women have significantly lower bone density if they are exposed to secondhand smoke -- even if they are themselves smokers.

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Child Safety Seats Reduce Risk of Death

Young children involved in car crashes may have a greater chance of survival if secured in a child restraint system, Michigan researchers find. Michael R. Elliott of University of Michigan at Ann Arbor examined vehicle crash data to compare the benefit of using child restraint systems, such as safety seats, to wearing seat belts alone in children 2 to 6 years old.

The study looked at 7,813 children in fatal crashes that involved at least one car that was left undriveable between 1998 and 2003. Overall, approximately one in 1,000 children in a two-way crash died, with 45 percent of all children in restraint seats. Compared with seat belts alone, child safety seats were associated with a 21-percent reduction in risk of death. When excluding cases of serious misuse of safety seats or belts, the reduced risk of death was 28 percent. "Child restraint systems offer improved fit of restraints for children who are too small for the adult-sized seat belt, thereby affording a mechanical protection advantage over seat belts," the researchers wrote in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

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Swimmer's Ear Can Be Avoided

Many U.S. children and adults will cool off this summer by a refreshing dip in a swimming pool, but excess moisture can lead to swimmer's ear. Swimmer's ear is an inflammation in the outer ear and ear canal, according to Dr. Peter Roland, chief of otolaryngology of the University of Texas. "To avoid swimmer's ear, keep moisture out by using ear plugs or by drying the ears with a hair dryer set on low, and avoiding water that may be polluted," said Roland, who helped craft national treatment guidelines for swimmer's ear. "Don't stick anything into the ears to get the water out, such as cotton swabs." Otherwise, the skin in the canal can become flaky and allow harmful bacteria into the tissue, resulting in an infection that's itchy and painful, says Roland. Swimmer's ear usually clears up in a few days with the use of an ear drop containing hydrocortisone to stop the itching and an antibiotic to stop the infection.

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Americans Just Keep Getting Larger

U.S. adults have become more overweight or obese in recent years, says a survey by Indiana University, dispelling the notion that a plateau had been reached. The study, appearing in the August Journal of the National Medical Association, found increasing rates of diabetes among U.S. adults and more direct links between excess weight and serious health conditions. Adults who were obese or severely obese were still, respectively, 26 percent and 50 percent more likely to report also having a serious health condition such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, hypertension, stroke, lung disease, asthma, thyroid disorders or kidney disease. Overall, 63 percent of adults surveyed in 2005 were overweight or obese, compared to 58 percent in a comparable national survey conducted in 2001. In 2005, 8.5 percent of respondents reported having diabetes, compared to 7.9 percent in 2001. “Despite the huge efforts and resources devoted to curbing the obesity epidemic, including government initiatives and media coverage, there is no sign of containment of the obesity epidemic among U.S. adults,” said public-health expert Dong-Chul Seo of Indiana University.

Teen Driver Restrictions Cut Crash Deaths

The more restrictions placed on a beginner teen driver, the less risk of a fatal car crash, say researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Lead author Susan P. Baker based the analyses on commonly found restrictions in existing graduated driver licensing programs that included: a minimum age of 15 1/2 for obtaining a learner’s permit, a waiting period after obtaining a learner’s permit of at least three months before applying for an intermediate license, a minimum of 30 hours of supervised driving, a minimum age of at least 16 years for obtaining an intermediate state license, a minimum age of at least 17 years for full licensing, a nighttime driving restriction and a restriction on carrying passengers. Comparing states with five program components to states without graduated driver licensing programs, the researchers reported an 18 percent reduction in fatal crashes involving 16-year-old drivers. Programs with six or seven components were associated with a 21 percent reductions. Annually, about 1,000 16-year-old U.S. drivers are involved in fatal crashes, according to study co-author Dr. Guohua Li. The findings are published in the journal *Pediatrics*.

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