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Newsletter

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One-Third of US Kids Use Alternative Therapy

About one-third of healthy U.S. children use some form of Complementary and Alternative or CAM therapy, according to researchers. Dr. Lawrence Rosen and Sunita Vohra also say 50-70% of children suffering from a chronic illness use CAM therapy, but the great majority of families using CAM therapies do not talk to their primary care doctors about it, and there can be negative consequences. The researchers discussed a variety of evidence-based approaches to integrating specific CAM therapies into daily practices such as the use of chiropractic, acupuncture, nutritional supplements, hypnosis and massage.

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Most US Mothers Don't Get Enough Sleep

A U.S. survey finds that 52% of America's moms feel that more sleep would make them better parents and 65% feel they would be happier. While tending to children keeps many mothers up at night, 36% of mothers are up at night thinking about the next day's "to-do list," 25% are stressing about family finances, and 24 percent are worrying about family issues, according to the survey of 500 moms by Braun Research. Fifty-four percent of mothers report not getting enough sleep, 59% of full-time working moms and 48% of stay-at-home moms. Although sleep problems are prevalent among mothers, four out of five have never spoken to their doctor. Many have never considered a sleep medication for fear they may get addicted or they want to be alert should their children need them, according to sleep specialist Dr. Suzanne Griffin of Georgetown University Hospital. "There are sleep-aid options available that can help these sleepless parents without these types of side effects," said Griffin. To get better sleep, Griffin recommends sticking to a bedtime schedule, avoiding alcohol, food and caffeine before bedtime, establishing a bedtime routine, creating a quiet, cool sleep environment and avoiding bringing problems to bed.

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An Apple-A-Day Does a Lot

Apples and apple juice may be among the best foods, according to a series of studies presented at the Society of Neuroscience's annual conference in Atlanta. Researchers G. Bureau and M. Martinoli of the University of Quebec a Trois-Rivieres found that quercetin, one of the antioxidants found abundantly in apples, was one of two compounds that helped to reduce cellular death that is caused by oxidation and inflammation of neurons.

Dr. Eric Gershwin of the University of California, Davis Health System discovered a way in which flavonoid-rich apples and apple juice protect cells from damage. Other research demonstrated how apples and apple juice can help boost neurological health, specifically in the brain.

A study by the University of Massachusetts Lowell, published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease, indicates that apple-juice consumption may actually increase the production in the brain of the essential neurotransmitter acetylcholine, resulting in improved memory among mice that have Alzheimer's-like symptoms.

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Fans Can Be Fit While Watching the Game

The University of Indianapolis' Krannert School of Physical Therapy says football fans can stay fit while watching the game. Anne Mejia Downs, an assistant professor, offers fitness tips for fans who can't turn away from the gridiron action:

1. Stand for part of the game instead of sitting; do wall squats, march in place or balance on one leg at a time.
2. While sitting, do chair push-ups, neck rotation and extension, or repeated lifts of a full beverage can or other object.
3. Lie on the floor for hamstring stretches, leg lifts and push ups.
4. Do a "touchdown dance" at the appropriate time.
5. If attending the game, walk around during breaks, or park farther away and enjoy the atmosphere of other fans walking through the city.

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Diabetic Devices Effective, But Not Used

A U.S. study finds that diabetic patients who use insulin pumps and blood-glucose-monitoring devices are better able to manage their blood sugar. However, Duke University researchers also found that the newer methods to manage diabetes are not being widely used because physicians may be reluctant to prescribe them, and even patients who are using them may not be deriving their full benefits. The lack of strong scientific evidence on the efficacy of newer devices, combined with insufficient patient-education resources for physicians and their patients, hinders the diffusion of new devices and contributes to their incorrect use, according to study leader Linda K. George. In addition, the researchers pointed to the higher costs of newer medical technologies and the demographics of diabetes as probable causes of low usage.

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Media-Savvy Teens Less Likely to Smoke

Teens who are savvier about the motives and methods of advertisers may be less inclined to smoke cigarettes, finds a U.S. study. Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine say thousands of adolescents each day are lured to smoking cigarettes by advertisements and movies that feature sophisticated models and actors, suggesting that smoking is a glamorous, grown-up activity.

“Many factors that influence a teen’s decision to smoke -- like peer influence, parental smoking and risk-seeking tendency -- are difficult to change,” said the study’s lead author, Dr. Brian Primack. However, media literacy, which can be taught, may be a valuable tool in efforts to discourage teens from smoking.”

Teens with above-average smoking media literacy are nearly half as likely to smoke as their less media-literate peers, according to the study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

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Exercise Helps to Quite Smoking

Austrian researchers found that exercise-training therapy was an effective smoking cessation aid without side effects. The researchers investigated whether exercise-based interventions combined with a smoking cessation program were more effective than a cessation program alone. Sixty-eight smokers participated and were randomly given either nicotine replacement therapy or nicotine replacement therapy with exercise training for three months. Forced expiratory volume and exhaled carbon monoxide were measured. While significant cigarette cessation was achieved in both groups, 80 percent in exercise training quit smoking, compared with 52 percent in the nicotine replacement therapy group. Researchers concluded that exercise training together with nicotine replacement therapy is feasible and aids smoking cessation. The findings are being presented at the 72nd Annual International Scientific Assembly of the American College of Chest Physicians in Salt Lake City.

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High Injury Rate for High School Athletes

One sports injury can lead to another, according to a study of more than 15,000 high school varsity athletes in North Carolina. Players who have ever sustained an injury are more than twice as likely as uninjured players to be hurt again, according to study leader Dr. Sarah Knowles of the Palo Alto Medical Foundation Research Institute in Palo Alto, Calif. Knowles did the study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The researchers combed through data on boys and girls participating in 12 varsity sports, in 100 high schools of all sizes from 1996 through 1999. The study, published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, found the rate of injury was 2.08 per 1,000 “athlete exposures,” or games or practices, but in athletes with a prior injury, the adjusted rate of reinjury was 1.94 per 1,000 exposures; for those without a prior injury it was 1 per 1,000.

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Lips Can Show Health As Well As Sickness

Full, smooth lips may show inner health, but lips that are chapped, cracked or sore can be a sign of more serious problems, says a U.S. dermatologist. Dr. Bruce P. Robinson of Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City says not only are healthy lips attractive, they are also very important to a person’s overall well-being. “Anyone with a problem or concern about his or her lips should visit a dermatologist to get a proper diagnosis and effective treatment,” he told the American Academy of Dermatology’s SKIN Academy. “Cold sores are extremely contagious -- if you have a cold sore, do not kiss anyone until it is completely healed. Even a light peck can spread the virus.” Cheilitis, or inflamed lips, can involve cracking at the corners of the mouth and can be brought on by an infection, excessive saliva or dental trauma. However, cheilitis can signal an underlying disease such as Crohn’s disease or Sjogren’s syndrome, a condition in which the body’s immune system attacks its moisture glands. Chapped lips can be caused by dry winter conditions or hot summer sun. Beeswax-based products or plain petroleum jelly can keep lips moist.

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1/3 of US Teens Unfit

Approximately one-third of U.S. teens ages 12-19 do not meet standards for physical fitness, according to a University of South Carolina study. Dr. Russell R. Pate assessed the physical fitness of 3,287 youth ages 12-19 who participated in the government-conducted National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey between 1999 and 2002. The participants were interviewed in their homes and were given a treadmill exercise test. "An increasing proportion of children have become obese since the 1980s, which may be explained by a decrease in physical activity - if so, it is likely that average physical fitness also has declined among youth in the same time period, since the last national survey." Older males were more physically fit than younger males, while the opposite was true for females. Participants who reported more sedentary behavior and those who spent less time being physically active were more likely not to be physically fit, according to the findings published in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine.

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Preventing Osteoporosis Begins Early

Inadequate calcium intake and lack of exercise during childhood are among the factors that increase osteoporosis risk. There is no known cure for osteoporosis, but evidence shows that prevention, early diagnosis and treatment can address the prevalence and debilitating effects of this disease, according to Dr. Laura K. Bachrach, professor of pediatrics at Stanford Medical Center. "Parents have total control over what their child eats, drinks and does from the time they are born until they start school, so early childhood is the best time to make milk, dairy products and activity part of the family lifestyle," said Bachrach. By using a whole-family approach to bone-building foods and activities, younger children will benefit by building peak bone mass while they are young and adults may reduce the rate of bone density loss later in life, according to Bachrach.

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Strawberries Good to Avoid Cold and Flu

One serving of eight medium strawberries contains 84 milligrams of vitamin C and a boost against colds and flu. Considered a "superfood," strawberries are loaded with nutrients, low in sugar and contain more vitamin C than oranges, according to Dr. Navindra Seeram of the Univ. of California Los Angeles Center for Human Nutrition. "Most people associate vitamin C with oranges, but if you look at oranges versus strawberries, strawberries actually contain more vitamin C than oranges," says Seeram. A healthy diet rich in vitamin C can help reduce the chance of catching a cold as well as limit severe symptoms and shorten their duration. Strawberries were available mostly in the spring, but California growers have introduced new varieties that boost the availability of strawberries in the fall and winter months, giving access to strawberries all year long.

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Not Only Does Skin Sag, So Do Facial Bones

Gravity and sagging skin aren't the only roadblocks to a youthful face, sagging facial bones also add to the aging look, say U.S. researchers. "As the skin sags, the bony framework underneath the skin deteriorates as well, contributing to the development of new folds, creases, wrinkles, droops and valleys," says Dr. David Kahn, of Stanford University. Kahn and Dr. Robert Shaw, a resident at the University of Rochester Medical Center, analyzed 30 men and 30 women separately using advanced, three-dimensional, computerized reconstruction of the facial skeleton. The participants were separated into three different age groups identified as young -- 25 to 44; middle-aged -- 45 to 64; and old -- 65-plus. They then measured the various bony structures in the face -- the slope of the cheekbone and the opening for the nose -- and compared these changes between age groups and genders. "In general, for most of our measurements, women experienced aging between young and middle age, and the men between middle age and old," Shaw said. The findings were presented at the American Society of Plastic Surgeons yearly convention in San Francisco.

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Many Low-Carb Eaters Eat Salad, Not Fats

A U.S. study suggests that the major change in eating patterns for dieters on low-carb diets has been the addition of large amounts of salads. Study author Richard Feinman of the State Univ. of NY Downstate Medical Center notes that 54% of dieters increased salad greens and 34% increased green vegetables by "at least double their usual consumption" in response to removing starches and sugars from their diets. Few of the 3,000 respondents reported that they had drastically increased consumption of such high-fat foods as beef, bacon or butter, popularly portrayed as features of low-carbohydrate diets. This was especially true of the half of the respondents who had lost 30 pounds or more and kept the weight off for more than one year. A doubling of consumption of chicken, however, a lower-fat food, was reported by 34% of the dieters. "The real import of the work is that physicians can prescribe a diet for people who want to do low-carb that involves replacing starch and sugar with green vegetables and salads, a diet that few could object to on conventional health- or nutrition-related grounds," says Feinman.

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Many Nail Myths Can Lead to Nail Damage

Many of the tips that people take for granted when it comes to nail care may in fact be myths that can damage nails, says a U.S. expert. “Healthy, strong nails are important not just for their looks but for performing the tasks of daily life, like picking up objects,” said dermatologist Dr. Marta J. VanBeek of the University of Iowa College of Medicine in Iowa City. “Most of us don’t realize the importance of our nails until we have a problem with them. Misconceptions about nail care abound and it’s important to know the facts so that you can keep your nails in top shape.” While some polishes that contain strengthening ingredients may help make nails less prone to splitting, they also increase nail stiffness, causing the nails to break more frequently under trauma, because they become hard and inflexible. Some swear that immersing nails in gelatin makes them stronger, but there is no scientific evidence it has any benefit. The best way to grow strong nails is to make sure that they are kept moisturized; most nail polish removers are alcohol based, so it is especially important to moisturize after removing nail polish, said VanBeek.

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