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HEADLINES (As it is)



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Stop smoking cigarettes before they make you blind

April 6, 2019/Hindustan Times

Do you smoke cigarettes? Think twice before taking another drag as it may not only damage your heart or lungs but can also make you blind, experts say. Smoking harms the retina - the light-sensing tissue in the back of the eyes, responsible for transmitting images to the brain. "It's like a film of a camera which converts light rays into impulses which help us see," Raja Narayanan, Head of L.V. Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI), Hyderabad told IANS. "Smoking increases the chemical compounds in the bloodstream thereby reducing blood and oxygen flow to the retina. This makes smokers two times more susceptible to Age related Macular Degeneration (AMD)," Narayanan added. A recent study, published in the journal Psychiatry Research, indicated significant changes in the smokers' red-green and blue-yellow colour vision, which suggested that consuming substances with neurotoxic chemicals, such as those in cigarettes, may cause overall colour vision loss. Smoking is one of the largest preventable causes of various diseases and premature deaths worldwide. India was among the top 10 countries together accounting for almost two-thirds of the world's smokers (63.6%) in 2015, according to a Global Burden of Disease study published in The Lancet in 2017. Smoking can further affect a bunch of eye diseases like cataract, glaucoma etc. While diseases related to the front of the eye are easily recognised, retinal diseases like AMD and Diabetic Macular Edema (DME) might develop silently and lead to progressive vision loss if not treated on time.

World Health Day 2019: History, significance and theme

April 7, 2019/Hindustan Times

World Health Day is celebrated each year on April 7, and is an initiative by the World Health Organisation to make people more aware of certain health issues. The World Health Assembly took place for the first time in 1948 and was held in Geneva. World Health Day is commemorated every year on this date because this was when WHO was founded, which came into being to address vital health care issues. The objective of the World Health Day is to spread awareness about equal health care facilities all over the world and to dispel all the myths that are there regarding health related matters. Organisations all over the world hold different kind of events related to health on this occasion.

Theme for 2019

The theme for this year's Health Day is universal health coverage. WHO is working towards a future where everyone should get the healthcare they need and when they need it. Adequate steps are being taken to ensure that someday in the future, this theme becomes a reality.

Significance

WHO acknowledges that the world is making progress in a lot of areas, however, millions of individuals still cannot get access to the right medical care at the right time. Countless others are such a bad state that they have to choose between eating or getting the medicines for treatment.

Add chokeberries in porridge to help boost health

April 7, 2019/Hindustan Times

While bananas and blueberries have been commonly used in porridge, a new study suggests that adding chokeberries, called ‘the healthiest fruit in the world’, can help boost health. High in antioxidants, chokeberries -- native to North America and also known as aronia berries - are not damaged when mixed with porridge unlike some other fruits, the Daily Mail reported. “The results demonstrate that porridge enriched with chokeberry fruit have a potential for becoming a good source of natural antioxidants,” said lead author Anna Oniszczuk from the Medical University of Lublin in Poland. For the study, the team made porridge with varying contents of chokeberry, with the highest one containing 20% fruit.

The findings, published in De Gruyter’s journal, revealed that the nutritional properties of the porridge did not degrade during the production process, despite the high temperatures used. This makes it appealing because the antioxidant capacity of some fruits can be significantly diminished by heat or oxidation during processing. In addition, increasing the chokeberry fruit content made the breakfast bowl higher in antioxidants, polyphenols, flavonoids and free phenolic acids, the study said.

Government likely to ban over 150 fixed dose combination drugs

April 8, 2019/Hindustan Times

More than 150 combination drugs have been found to lack therapeutic justification and have been recommended to be banned by an expert panel, two people aware of the matter said. The Chandrakant Kokate-led expert panel, which was probing the efficacy of about 500 fixed dose combinations (FDCs) drugs, submitted its report to the Drug Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) on April 2, the people said, requesting anonymity. “The report has suggested quite a number of FDCs are irrational and hence recommended them to be banned,” one of the two people cited above said.

DTAB, the government’s top advisory body on drugs, has formed a sub-committee to review the panel’s report and “validate the findings before the government takes a final decision on the fate of these drugs”, another person said.

The report, if accepted by the government, could deal another blow to domestic drug makers. Therapeutic benefits of many combination medicines sold in India are suspected to be doubtful and some may even pose health risks, prompting the government to launch a crackdown on such “irrational” drugs. The government banned 344 such combination drugs in 2016. The 500 or so FDCs made up the second batch of combination drugs that were examined by the Kokate panel. A FDC drug contains two or more active ingredients in a fixed dosage ratio.

The sub-committee to review the panel’s report has been formed under the chairmanship of Nilima Kshirsagar, chair of clinical pharmacology at the Indian Council of Medical Research.

Common food additive may weaken defenses against influenza

April 8, 2019/Hindustan Times



Food additive tert-butylhydroquinone (tBHQ)-found in many common products from frozen meat to crackers and fried foods-suppresses the immune response the body mounts when fighting the flu, a recent study suggests.

In addition to increasing the severity of flu symptoms, the study found evidence that tBHQ exposure could reduce the effectiveness of the flu vaccine through its effects on T cells, a vital component of the immune system.

Researchers say the connection may help explain why seasonal influenza continues to pose a major health threat worldwide. An estimated 290,000-650,000 people globally die from flu-related respiratory problems each year.

“Our studies showed that mice on a tBHQ diet had a weakened immune response to influenza (flu) infection. In our mouse model, tBHQ suppressed the function of two types of T cells, helper and killer T cells. Ultimately, this led to more severe symptoms during subsequent influenza infection,” Robert Freeborn, lead researcher of the study discussed in Experimental Biology 2019 meeting.

When a person is infected with influenza virus, helper T cells direct other parts of the immune system and help coordinate an appropriate response, while killer T cells hunt down infected cells and clear them from the body.

“It can be hard to know if you are consuming tBHQ, as it is not always listed on ingredient labels,” said Freeborn, adding that this is often the case when tBHQ is used in food preparation, such as in the oil used to fry a chip.

“The best way to limit tBHQ exposure is to be cognizant about food choices. Since tBHQ is largely used to stabilize fats, a low-fat diet and cutting down on processed snacks will help reduce tBHQ consumption.”

Freeborn emphasised that getting a yearly flu shot remains the best way to prevent influenza infection. Though it is possible to contract the flu after getting the vaccine, being vaccinated has been shown to significantly reduce the length and severity of the illness.

Drugs used to treat erectile dysfunction may cause side effects affecting vision

April 9, 2019/Hindustan Times

A recent study has observed that drugs which are used to treat erectile dysfunction and pulmonary hypertension, like sildenafil (Viagra) and vardenafil (Levitra), can stop the reaction in PDE6 resulting in side effects affecting vision.

In the study published in the journal Science Advances, researchers have captured for the first time, the full-length structure of the rod photoreceptor phosphodiesterase 6 (PDE6), an enzyme that plays an indispensable role in human vision. “PDE5 inhibitors are associated with several visual side effects, including blurred vision, changes in colour vision, extreme sensitivity to light, and in extreme cases, damage to the optic nerve that relays optical signals to the brain. These side effects are caused by the binding of PDE5 inhibitors to PDE6 in the retina,” said Sahil Gulati, the lead researcher. PDEs are associated with various diseases and are targets of several widely used drugs and major targets for drug development. Unfortunately, many of these enzymes have similar structures, particularly their catalytic domains, where the chemical reaction takes place. Because of this, inhibitors that target one type of PDE can stop the reaction in multiple members of the PDE family, resulting in unwanted side effects. Several cases of patients experiencing vision changes after using sildenafil citrate have been reported.

Researchers used single-particle cryo-electron microscopy to visualise the full-length PDE6 enzyme. They revealed fish-hook-like regions of the PDE6 structure that forms potential signal transduction routes from the regulatory domains of PDE6 to its catalytic domain.



Sunscreen use could lead to better blood vessel health, study suggests

April 9, 2019/Hindustan Times

Sunscreen protects the skin's blood vessel function from harmful ultraviolet radiation (UVR) exposure by protecting dilation of the blood vessels. Perspiration on the skin may also provide protection to the skin's blood vessels from sun damage, a recent study has suggested. UVR from the sun has been well-documented as a contributing factor to skin cancer and premature skin aging. UVR has also been found to reduce nitric oxide-associated dilation of skin blood vessels (vasodilation) by reducing the amount of nitric oxide available in the skin. Nitric oxide is a compound essential for blood vessel health. Vasodilation of the skin's blood vessels plays an important role in regulating body temperature and responding to heat stress, both locally in the skin and throughout the body.

The UVR-only site was found to have less nitric oxide-associated vasodilation than in the control arm. However, the sunscreen- and sweat-treated sites did not show these reductions in nitric oxide-associated vasodilation. "Further, when sunscreen was applied prior to UVR, UVR exposure actually augmented [nitric oxide-associated vasodilation] compared to [the control arm], or when sweat was on the skin. The presence of sunscreen or sweat on the skin may play a protective role against this effect [of UVR]," the research team wrote. "For those who spend a lot of time working, exercising or participating in other various activities outdoors, using sunscreen may protect not only against skin cancer but also against reductions in skin vascular function," wrote S. Tony Wolf, MA, first author of the study.

Unhealthy diet plan is more hazardous than smoking cigarettes: Study

April 10, 2019/Indian Express

The study revealed that poor diet plans was the reason for deaths of over 10.9 million people among adults in the year 2017, while smoking was responsible for 8.0 million deaths. The proverbial saying – 'you are what you eat' holds deep significance, as a recent study has revealed that an unhealthy or low-nutrient diet is more hazardous than smoking cigarettes. The study, published in the international medical journal The Lancet, observed and assessed the consumption of major foods and nutrients across 195 countries among adults over the age of 25. Advertising. The study observed the relationship between suboptimal diet and the rate of mortality. Over 130 scientists from around 40 countries took part in the analysis, the results of which are sure to make you switch to a healthy diet immediately. The researchers also pointed out three specific eating habits – low intake of whole grains, low intake of fruits, and high consumption of sodium – had a harsh impact on people's health. According to the study, food items that are linked to high death rates are red meat, processed meats, sugar-sweetened beverages, and trans fatty acids among other foods.

Dogs may accurately sniff out cancer in blood

April 10,2019/Hindustan Times

Dogs have smell receptors 10,000 times more accurate than humans, making them highly sensitive to odours we can't perceive, said researchers who presented the study at the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology annual meeting in Florida, US. Dogs can use their highly evolved sense of smell to pick out human blood samples with cancer with almost 97% accuracy, according to a study that may lead to inexpensive and non-invasive screening approaches for the deadly disease. Dogs have smell receptors 10,000 times more accurate than humans, making them highly sensitive to odours we can't perceive, said researchers who presented the study at the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology annual meeting in Florida, US. "Although there is currently no cure for cancer, early detection offers the best hope of survival," said Heather Junqueira, lead researcher at the US-based healthcare company BioScentDx. "One is using canine scent detection as a screening method for cancers, and the other would be to determine the biologic compounds the dogs detect and then design cancer-screening tests based on those compounds," she said. BioScentDx plans to use canine scent detection to develop a non-invasive way of screening for cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

World Parkinson's Day 2019: Useful tips to help fight Parkinson's disease

April 11,2019/Indian Express

World Parkinson's Day is celebrated on April 11 to create awareness about the long-term degenerative disorder. It also marks the birthday of James Parkinson, a physician who described the disease. Parkinson's is one of the most common neurodegenerative and movement disorder. Progressive loss of controlled muscle activity, which leads to trembling of the limbs and head while at rest, stiffness, slowness, and impaired balance are some of the characteristics of the disease. While there is no singular diet that can treat the condition, a healthy and balanced diet can significantly improve a person's well-being. On World Parkinson's Day, which is observed on April 11 to create awareness about the disease, Dr Jyoti Bala Sharma, senior consultant, department of neurology, Fortis Hospital, Noida suggests some foods that should be consumed (and avoided), along with a few useful tips that may help fight Parkinson's.

Car pollution caused asthma in 350,000 Indian kids

April 11,2019/The Tribune

Traffic pollution caused asthma among 350,000 children in India, the second largest after China, in 2015, finds a Lancet study that analysed 194 countries. The study, published in the Lancet Planetary Health, found that the largest number of cases (760,000) of traffic pollution-related asthma was in China. It could be because China has the second largest population of children and the third highest concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), which is an indicator of traffic pollution. India had the next largest number of cases (350,000) due to its large population of children, said researchers from the George Washington University in the US. The US (240,000), Indonesia (160,000) and Brazil (140,000) had the next largest

burdens. India ranks below other countries for this metric because although levels of other pollutants (particularly PM2.5) in the country are among the highest in the world, NO2 levels (between 2010 and 2012) in Indian cities appear to be lower than or comparable with European and US cities, the researchers said. "Improving access to cleaner forms of transportation, like electric public transport and active commuting by cycling and walking, would not only lower NO2 levels but would also reduce asthma, enhance physical fitness and cut greenhouse gas emissions," Anenberg said. — IANS



Is animal-based protein a good choice for health?

April 12, 2019/Deccan Chronicle

A new study has found that the diet rich in animal protein and meat is not a good choice for health. The study, which was published in the 'American Journal of Clinical Nutrition', pointed that men who preferred animal protein over a plant-based diet suffered from a greater risk of death followed for 20 years than men having a more balanced diet. For men, whose protein source was animal-based had a 23 per cent higher risk of death. The participants in the research mainly had red meat intake. The mean age of the men participating in the study was 53 years at the onset. The study also found that a high overall intake of dietary protein was associated with a greater risk of death in men who had been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease or cancer at the onset of the study. A similar association was not found in men without these diseases. The analyses focused on the associations of dietary protein and protein sources with mortality during the follow-up and other lifestyle factors and dietary habits were extensively controlled for, including the fact that those eating plenty of plant-based protein followed a healthier diet. "However, these findings should not be generalised to older people who are at a greater risk of malnutrition and whose intake of protein often remains below the recommended amount," Heli Virtanen.

With regards,

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